

**DANCING IN HIS HEAD: THE EVOLUTION OF ORNETTE COLEMAN'S MUSIC  
AND COMPOSITIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

Ornette Coleman (1930-2015) is frequently referred to as not only a great visionary in jazz music but as also the father of the jazz avant-garde movement. As such, his work has been a topic of discussion for nearly five decades among jazz theorists, musicians, scholars and aficionados. While this music was once controversial and divisive, it eventually found a wealth of supporters within the artistic community and has been incorporated into the jazz narrative and canon. Coleman’s musical practices found their greatest acceptance among the following generations of improvisers who embraced the message of “free jazz” as a natural evolution in style. Performers such as Jamaaladeen Tacuma, David Murray, Pat Metheny and John Zorn incorporated the techniques of spontaneous group improvisation and what Coleman described as “harmolodic” organization into their own performance.

This dissertation traces Coleman’s rise from relative obscurity to a place of greater celebrity in jazz and other musical circles. Coleman’s acceptance by the academy, other composers, notable jazz musicians, and the public is discussed in terms of how these shifts were made, and in what ways Coleman—who often felt victimized and mistreated by record company executives, critics, and musical establishments—transcended the gaps in his musical training in order to create his own distinctive and influential compositional style. This “harmolodic theory” was then refined over a period of nearly 55 years.

The work discusses harmolodics in detail by building on the taxonomic models described by Ekkard Jost and Peter N. Wilson. It describes the variations in compositional practice as Coleman's style evolved from 1980 until his death in 2015. The analysis supplements transcriptions and harmonic analyses with spectrograms and waveforms in order to illuminate specific areas of Coleman's work. These graphic representations clarify observations made through transcription and reinforce some of the concepts embodied in Coleman's unique philosophy of music.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a multidimensional examination of the life and work of Ornette Coleman (1930-2015) from the period of 1980-2015. While a number of authors have documented the controversy surrounding Ornette Coleman's arrival on the New York jazz scene and the influence of his ideas upon his contemporaries, little has been written about the effects of his later music. As noted in Peter Niklas Wilson's *Ornette Coleman: His Life and Music*, Coleman's musical personality is ever evolving.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, his impact cannot be succinctly defined by one or even two decades of creative activity. It is no secret that musicians that had previously worked with Coleman e.g. Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and James "Blood" Ulmer, continued to employ his concepts.

Yet many who had not recorded or performed with him, e.g. John Zorn, Anthony Braxton, and David Murray, cite Coleman as one of their primary influences. Other notable musicians (and influential artists in their own right) including Pat Metheny and Geri Allen, began to work with him during the latter half of his career. I argue that Coleman's greatest influence on other musicians occurred long after the initial controversy surrounding his unique approach to music had subsided, and younger musicians embraced the ideas and sounds of the avant-garde as a natural evolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Niklas Wilson, *Ornette Coleman: His Life and Music*, (Berkeley: Berkeley Hills Books, 1999) Wilson refers to a letter to the editor from an issue of a 1997 *Down Beat* magazine that indicates that Ornette is "constantly stretching the boundaries of jazz." The author of the letter is anonymous.

This study is aimed at discovering specific changes in compositional practice in Coleman's music that may be traced to both musical and extra-musical sources of the last three decades. The acceptance of Coleman's practices by the academy, and the founding of his own record company are also factors that will be considered. The study uses transcriptions and other analyses to demonstrate links between the music of the groups led by Coleman and that of other avant-garde musicians so as to determine the nature of his influence on later generations of composers and improvisers. Finally, the dissertation addresses the qualities that have defined Coleman's music and the jazz avant-garde for the last thirty years and whether or not changing expectations within that genre have affected this music and influenced the opinions and ideas of both critics and audiences.

Coleman may be a perfect example of a musician who has experienced an "outsider artist" dynamic in his overall reception—an artist who was initially disregarded and not taken seriously, but later canonized and discussed with great respect. Coincidentally, his initial works were only a decade after Jean DuBuffet first coined the term *art brut* to discuss the relevance of folk art and the validity of works made by those who had no formal training. Coleman seems to parallel the disregard for established values in jazz and classical music that defines such "raw art," and he shares that set of values with some of the students of his ensembles.

## **1.1 AIMS OF THIS STUDY**

At the end of the 1970s, Ornette Coleman began touring and recording with the most stable and long lasting ensemble of his career. This group, Prime Time, finally solidified his concept of group improvisation based upon a prescribed formula or underlying theme. The group's concept also involved the use of thematic material, catchy melodic "hooks," and electric instruments, all devices intended to help the musician recapture the connection to the audience that he had once had as a young R&B saxophonist in Texas. Ironically, these new ideas only seemed to increase his isolation, as jazz fans began to turn their backs on experimental musicians and embraced the more traditional sound of the "young lions" generation.

Regardless, Prime Time survived for over a decade and left a lasting impression on the jazz establishment. Even after the group's disbandment, Coleman continued to push himself in new musical directions and explore new concepts including changes in instrumentation and incorporation of electronic and digital sounds. This later work reinforced Coleman's permanent place as a leader in the jazz avant-garde and a perennial innovator despite the perpetually decreasing number of jazz listeners in American society. Likewise, musicians that had previously worked with, or been a part of the Prime Time ensemble continued to utilize the creative processes that they had learned as members of the group, adapting them to pursue their own professional goals.

From 1980 onward, Coleman's creative output was relatively more stable in terms of band member turnover, finances and record contracts, than in earlier stages of his career, allowing him to work with a number of musicians that not only grasped his realized vision of the "improvising

ensemble” but elevated him to a position of leadership within the jazz community. The 1980s and 1990s in particular found Coleman both recording and performing live with a host of younger improvisers. Notable among these collaborations are works with Pat Metheny (*Song X*, 1985), Jerry Garcia (*Virgin Beauty*, 1988), and Geri Allen (*Eyes In the Back of Your Head*, 1994, *Sound Museum: Three Women*, *Sound Museum: Hidden Man* 1996). He has also appeared with Joe Henry (*Scar*, 2001) and Lou Reed (*The Raven*, 2003). As previously stated, very few of the compositions from these records have been analyzed and Coleman is rarely credited with being an influence on the work of any of these musicians.

In addition, the last 20 years have seen a greater acceptance of Coleman’s recordings and musical ideas than any previous decade. Several of his pieces, once described as “anti-jazz,” have now become standards in the jazz repertoire. As such, countless musicians have been influenced by Coleman’s music. Many pieces are featured in jazz study and practice tools like *The Real Book*, and “play along” recordings such as those published by Jamey Abersold (Hal Lenord), giving young and aspiring artists earlier access to his musical ideas.

His compositions have also been performed and reinterpreted by a host of well-known artists. For example, John Zorn’s 1989 record *Spy vs. Spy* is completely composed of Ornette Coleman compositions played in an aggressive, miniaturist style. Other interpretations can be found through the group of Coleman alumni that performed as the Old and New Dreams quartet throughout the 1980s, and on the records of artists like Dave Liebman, David Murray, and Joshua Redman. In 2007, Coleman’s record *Sound Grammar* won the Pulitzer Prize and he was honored with a lifetime achievement award at the Grammys.

This increasing acclaim is perhaps the result of Coleman’s own efforts to perform and appeal to a broader audience and increase the awareness of his recordings through self-promotion

and marketing via his own record company (first known as Artists House and later Harmolodic Records). He performed at the popular music festival Bonnaroo in 2007, and has since curated festivals and found opportunities to both showcase his new work and elevate the exposure of other artists such as the Meltdown Festival in 2009.

The primary objective of this study is to demonstrate how Ornette Coleman's work has evolved and served as a model or blueprint for later generations of avant-garde musicians both within and outside a jazz context. A related objective will thus be to isolate and analyze the specific changes taking place in Coleman's musical conception throughout the last 30 years and develop a deeper understanding of his choices in ensembles, musicians and style.

Lastly, the work defines the musical methodology of “harmolodics,” a term coined by Coleman to describe an enigmatic theory that rests at the foundation of all of his compositions and performances. This compositional philosophy determines Coleman’s approach to music, and his relationships to other artists, and his vision of the artistic world as a whole. The study also seeks to understand how other artists have reinterpreted his thinking when dealing with Coleman’s pieces for their own purposes.

This work makes contributions in several areas. First, it creates a model for examining and quantifying the degree to which Coleman’s music has changed since its his initial recordings, including but not limited to: harmonic and rhythmic structure in composition and in improvisation, use of form, orchestration, intensity, and choice of ensemble. Second, the study provides valuable biographical information on the latter half of Ornette Coleman’s life, much of which has been

neglected in favor of the details surrounding his earlier music.<sup>2</sup> Last, it investigates what Coleman's music means in the 21st century and whether or not his work is still relevant to modern musicians who are identified with the avant-garde movement.

To accomplish these objectives an examination of biographical material relevant to the musical life of Ornette Coleman has been conducted in order to outline the factors pertinent to his changing compositional style.

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**

### **1.2.1 Biographic Research**

The most recent and detailed accounts of Ornette Coleman's life can be found in John Litweiler's *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*, (1992) and Peter Niklas Wilson's *Ornette Coleman, His Life and Music*, (1999). Both works are very detailed in their descriptions of Coleman's life and give a wealth of information about his music up until about 1980. After that, Litweiler's work begins to leave gaps and Wilson's stops entirely.<sup>3</sup> There are few other sources that even mention Coleman's later career at all. In order to gain a true perspective of Coleman's life during this time, primary source interviews have been conducted with his son Denardo Coleman, and other members of his

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<sup>2</sup> John Litweiler's *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life* was written in 1992 and has yet to be updated to include the last 20 years of Coleman's career.



ensembles. Other sources of information such as published interview transcripts in books, newspaper and magazine articles, and album liner notes have been used as supplemental material. Some musicians interviewed include: Jamaaladeen Tacuma, David Murray, James Blood Ulmer, Matthew Shipp, Bern Nix, and Bob Weir (of the Grateful Dead). Discussions of music and practice/performance techniques have been evaluated in order to gain a sense of how Coleman has influenced musical growth in his collaborators and in later generations of musicians. Additionally, Carla Bley, Anthony Braxton, John Zorn, Bobby Bradford, Cecil Taylor, Patti Smith, Al McDowell, and Charles Ellerbee, were contacted to confirm details, but declined to give extensive interviews.

### **1.2.2 Ethnographic Research**

In addition to biographical information, the work also contains a detailed ethnographic study of the jazz avant-garde in order to determine Coleman's particular place in the movement throughout the past three decades. The discussion will include details surrounding the interaction between musicians of the avant-garde during the time period, including but not limited to: changes in performance venues and targeted audiences, and business dealings with the recording industry. It investigates how Coleman fits into the picture of a larger avant-garde community in New York.

Emphasis is again placed on primary source material. In addition to discussing the nature of personal influence, the artists interviewed have been asked to comment on what they determine to be Coleman's contributions to the genre in respect to his support, mentorship, or simply his

existence as a role model. It will discuss the ways in which he and his work are still viewed as relevant among the newest “cutting edge” improvisers.

More importantly, this discussion delves into the core of the concept of the avant-garde to access both the inspirations and motivations of members of the movement, and to answer the question of whether or not such a collective effort still exists in the plethora of unique artists and diversification of modern music industry. One of the earliest observations made about free jazz was that it was anti-establishment. How do artists subvert the mainstream when there no longer is a mainstream? How do these musicians reconcile their art within the framework of the modern jazz and larger musical culture?

### **1.2.3 Analytical Framework**

Transcription is a valuable tool for students of jazz and scholars seeking to develop melodic, motivic and harmonic understanding of the mannerisms of a specific artist. Ekkhard Jost devised a methodology for analyzing Coleman's solos and compositions through transcription in his seminal text *Free Jazz* in 1974. He devises a classification system for the compositions as well, labeling some as “bebop derived themes” and others as pure “Coleman themes.”

These “Coleman themes” are unique in that their complexity results from combinations of “melodically, rhythmically, or emotionally heterogeneous” musical statements. In other words, Jost seems to find these melodies as always containing some elements of juxtaposition. One of Coleman's best-known pieces, “Lonely Woman,” would easily fit the model of a “Coleman theme”

due to its slow, legato melodic structure paired with underlying, tumultuous, New Orleans-style parade drumming.

Jost's taxonomy was later expanded by Peter Niklas Wilson, in *Ornette Coleman: His Life and Music* (1999). Wilson's new system adds a category for "combinations" of both methods and further divides the group of "Coleman themes" into three subgroups: "rubato themes," (slow moving melodies with juxtaposing rhythm section accompaniment) "modular themes," (melodies created from sequential motion) and "endless riffs" (repetitive motives in melody instruments with rapidly changing harmonic and rhythmic background). Table one indicates the new taxonomy as envisioned by Wilson with included examples of compositions that meet the provided criteria.

Wilson's Revised Classification System for Coleman Compositions				
A. Bebop Derived	B. Coleman Themes			C. Combinations of A and B
"Bird Food" (1961)	B1 Rubato Themes	B2 Modular Themes	B3 Endless Riffs	"Congeniality" (1960)
	"Lonely Woman" (1959)	"Mind and Time" (1959)	"Dancing In Your Head" (1973)	

**Table 1: Wilson's revised classification system.**

Other uses of Jost's methodology can be found in Michael Bruce Cogswell's *Melodic Organization in Four Solos by Ornette Coleman* (1989), which uses Jost's ideas of "motivic chain associations" to show sequences in rhythm, melodic contour and thematic variation and Lynette Westendorf's *Analyzing Free Jazz* (1994), which uses Jost's methods of analysis in conjunction with more traditional techniques of reviewing form, melody and structure.

However, Wilson's work is the only one that has expanded upon Jost's original categorizations and even begins to look at the music from later periods. It is important to also note that while transcription provides a great deal of information and may even give some indication of influence in compositional practice, it is limited in terms of establishing links in playing style between musicians as the majority of free improvisers do not use clear motives based on established chord changes. It can be argued that the alumni of the Coleman ensembles, particularly the early ones like Don Cherry and Charlie Haden, tend to develop their solos based on the melodic material of the head arrangement, much in the same way that Coleman does. However, this is less true of the Prime Time band, in which Coleman often remains a fixed point, repeating a consistent theme, whilst other musicians improvise simultaneously, much in the same fashion as the turn of the century, New Orleans, brass bands.

This dissertation combines traditional methods of transcription and analysis with spectrographic images of the music. Spectrograms have been used by scholars to differentiate the instrumental timbre of instruments or even the characteristic styles of performers on specific recordings. They allow an analyst to view the specific parameters that comprise an individual's unique sonic fingerprint and often help to substantiate ideas presented through more traditional approaches.

This study augments the available analytical criteria with spectral parameters in order to address questions pertaining to the ways in which musicians interact during collective improvisation. For example: how can we quantify the unique nuances in the sound color or forms favored by a particular ensemble? In what ways does the ensemble create intensity, formal shape, and musical direction? In what ways do performers think about timbre during improvisation? Additionally, such an approach takes into account the sound of the entire improvising ensemble and therefore allows for the analysis of the resulting cumulative spectrum as part of a sonic profile. These sonic profiles can then be compared in order to gain a more accurate picture of any trends in Coleman's works that might typically elude conventional analytical practices.

While numerous jazz musicians and scholars have often been able to surmise that certain musicians have been influenced by others, few have attempted to show a correlation between styles through analysis. When these issues are addressed in a traditional theoretical framework, more often than not, the author is dealing with music that could be considered to be “tonal” or containing clear motives and stylistic patterns, and the primary method for demonstrating such similarity is through transcription and analysis. Notable exceptions to this are Ekkhard Jost's *Free Jazz* and Paul B. Cherlin's *Flow, Gesture and Spaces in Free Jazz*, the latter of which uses almost no traditional notation.

Furthermore, out of all the attempts to analyze avant-garde jazz, there are no other attempts to employ spectrograms. This powerful tool supplements traditional transcription with textural and timbral analysis in graphic form, and offers a multipronged approach that helps analysis capture some of the richness of freely improvised music. Computer generated waveforms and spectrograms can highlight a multiplicity of details that might be missed by simply creating a notational transcription.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION: COLEMAN'S LIFE AND MUSIC PRE-1980

I would like to begin by stating that this section is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of Coleman's life and music from the period of 1930 (his birth) until 1980. This information can already be found in a variety of other sources including his official biography, John Litweiler's *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*.<sup>4</sup>

It is my intent to provide a necessary understanding of Coleman's work in the initial two decades in order to highlight a shift in his compositional thinking that took place in the mid-1970s and continued to inform his creative decisions in the decades to follow. It is important to have a firm understanding of Coleman's work and theoretical practices in order to access and appreciate his uniqueness as a performer, composer, and innovator. Such information is also useful to determine his place in the jazz tradition and how it has changed over the span of his entire career. In order to accomplish this, details surrounding Coleman's life and upbringing that are not explicitly linked to his music have been intentionally omitted. The following section is divided into three subsections detailing Coleman's musical life and music before his retreat from the jazz scene in 1963, his return to public performance, 1965-1970, and the refinement of his music and concepts from 1971-1980.

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<sup>4</sup> Coleman's official biography is John Litweiler's *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life*, published in 1992.

## 2.1 COLEMAN'S MUSIC PRE-1963

Ornette Coleman began his career as a professional musician in Fort Worth, Texas in the mid-1940s.<sup>5</sup> His first gigs were mainly working in juke joints and taverns and sitting in with the blues bands that frequented the area. Although Coleman is now known as an alto saxophonist, these early performances were primarily played on the tenor saxophone, the more marketable staple of rhythm and blues bands.<sup>6</sup> His first regular gig was as a member of an R&B band lead by Red Connor(s).<sup>7</sup>

In the Connor band, Coleman learned to read music and also about the distinctions between what Connor called “popular” and “serious” jazz, likely meaning the differences between blues or R&B and the emerging style of bebop. Coleman also got the opportunity to perform bebop-influenced arrangements with the Connor band, but as Coleman recalls, the primary element in all of the band’s pieces was still the melodic content. Coleman discussed the band’s treatment of melody with A.B. Spellman.

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<sup>5</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Coleman’s rearing in the blues tradition is not dissimilar to that of other notable saxophonists from Texas including: Eddie “Lockjaw” Davis, Illinois Jacquet, Buddy Tate, David “Fathead” Newman, Dewey Redman, Arnett Cobb and King Curtis. The term “Texas tenor” is a well-known description of a school of saxophone playing characterized by a deep, raw, bluesy sound. More recent examples of this style can be found in the work of Quamon Fowler. Coleman’s own “rawness” as a saxophonist can possibly be a result of attempting to fit in with this tradition of artists. The connection is especially clear when one considers that Coleman began his professional career on the tenor saxophone, the same instrument as the aforementioned artists.

<sup>7</sup> The spelling of Connor’s name is unclear. Conflicting sources use Connor in *Texas Blues* or Connors in *Four Lives*. Coleman’s official biography uses “Connors” but this is likely because it is informed by A.B. Spellman’s *Four Lives in the Bebop Business*. Other interviews with Texas musicians indicate that this is the same Red Connor with whom David “Fathead” Newman was also performing, and the two of them would occasionally work in the same group, Coleman on tenor and Newman on alto. For that reason, this work uses the “Connor” spelling.

The notes that made up the musical passages were the most important thing to him, what notes and what order they were played in. I found this to be a very important asset to me in learning to play music because with many things, if you don't have it in your head, you might not be able to repeat it. So if you have the notes in your head and you know how to phrase those notes, you can get the passage that you played before<sup>8</sup>

In this interview we get a clear picture of Connor's influence on Coleman during a formative period. Rather than simply dismissing this Connor band as a "job" that Coleman had as a teenager, we can see a mentor/mentee relationship between the two saxophonists, with Connor indicating to Coleman a clear stylistic direction and principles of solid musicianship. The fact that this was perhaps the first gig where Coleman was hired as a full time band member undoubtedly strengthened this influence.

Coleman's stint with the group ended abruptly however, when he made one of his first forays into what could be considered "free" improvisation. He recalls that the band was playing "some standard theme like 'Stardust' and it was my turn to solo on the chord changes of the tune. In that situation, it's like having to know the results of the all the changes before you even play them, compacting them all in your mind. So once I did that, and once I had it all compacted in my head I literally removed it all and just played."<sup>9</sup> But neither the audience nor Coleman's band mates looked favorably upon this experiment. He was fired after the performance.

After this incident, the now 19-year-old Coleman found a new job with a traveling minstrel show, Silas Green from New Orleans. It afforded him the opportunity to finally perform outside of Texas, something that the young musician had been aspiring to do for years. But the music was

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<sup>8</sup> Spellman, *Four Lives*, 90.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 93.



old-fashioned, corny, and exploited derogatory stereotypes of African Americans for comedic effect. When reflecting on this time period to A.B. Spellman, Coleman called the experience the “worst job I ever had.”<sup>10</sup>

Coleman was fired from the minstrel show when it passed through Mississippi and took up a few journeyman gigs on tenor saxophone to earn enough to make it back to Texas. His new ideas about improvisation continued to cause problems for him on the road. During a stint with the Clarence Samuels band in Louisiana, Coleman was forced to stop playing in the middle of a solo by jeers and heckling from the audience. It was after this particular gig, Coleman remembers, that a group of men approached him outside the venue and attacked him, then destroyed his tenor saxophone, depriving him of his primary source of income.<sup>11</sup>

After briefly returning to Fort Worth to acquire a new instrument, Coleman got a second chance to leave Texas, this time with the R&B guitarist Pee Wee Crayton. But when the band arrived in Los Angeles many of them were drafted into the army for the Korean War, leaving Coleman alone in California.<sup>12</sup>

This trip also proved difficult for the young musician. He struggled to find paying gigs and his forays into new harmonic territory earned him a bad reputation among the local jazz musicians.<sup>13</sup> He couldn’t find a steady day job and before long asked his mother to wire him the money for a train ticket home.

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<sup>10</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Litweiler mentions that Coleman also received a draft notice but was deemed to be unfit for service due to a childhood injury that had not healed correctly.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 23.

Another trip to Los Angeles in 1953 would prove more fruitful. Coleman rented a house with drummer Ed Blackwell but their collaboration was foiled due to the lack of a regular bassist. Additionally, both Coleman and Blackwell were soundly rejected by the established LA jazz musicians. Coleman began hitchhiking to the San Fernando Valley in order to sit in with Gerry Mulligan. It was here that Coleman started to attract a few followers, most notably the poet Jayne Cortez who would become his wife in 1954. Cortez introduced both Coleman and Blackwell to some of the younger, more adventurous musicians in LA and perhaps Coleman's most important collaborator, trumpeter Don Cherry.

Cherry, along with drummer Billy Higgins, was already earning a reputation as an up and coming performer and was leading a group called the Jazz Messiahs with saxophonist James Clay and pianist George Newman. Soon, Coleman had replaced Clay as the group's saxophonist and supplied most of the band's original compositions. They caught a break in 1957 when Cherry was able to arrange a gig with the Vancouver Jazz Society at the Cellar, a popular LA nightclub.<sup>14</sup> The three sets played that night contained nothing but Coleman's original compositions. Furthermore, two of the sets were recorded and broadcast over the local radio station CFUN. Shortly after, the band was approached by Red Mitchell, one of the most respected bassists in the city, who referred them to Contemporary Records so that Coleman might be able to sell some of his compositions.

The president of Contemporary, Lester Koenig, liked Coleman's music so much that he not only offered to buy seven compositions, but invited Coleman to lead a recording date which took place over three sessions in February and March of 1958.<sup>15</sup> The final product was released as

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Niklas Wilson, *Ornette Coleman: His Life and Music*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 19.

*Something Else! The Music of Ornette Coleman*. It featured Don Cherry on trumpet, Walter Norris on piano, Don Payne on bass, and Billy Higgins on drums. According to Coleman, the music on the album was composed between 1950 and 1953 and was intended to use chord changes in a pseudo-bebop style. It isn't difficult to see what Coleman means by this. The heads to "Jayne" and "Chippie," bear some resemblance to the bebop material being recorded around the same time.

The tempos of the pieces combined with their harmonic material suggest that Coleman already had a basic working knowledge of how bebop tunes were constructed. Furthermore, the melodic and rhythmic material of both "Jayne" and "Chippie" are mildly derivative of melodies constructed by Charlie Parker, namely "My Little Suede Shoes" and "Scrapple From the Apple" respectively.

So even if Coleman wasn't actually playing Parker's tunes "note for note," he was at least listening to them and developing his own approaches to the material already constructed by Bird and other bebop musicians. This is very evident in some sections of the recording where both Coleman and Cherry play sections of freely improvised music disregarding of the harmony in the rhythm section.

It was about these sections that pianist Walter Norris later remarked that Coleman "doesn't seem to know his own tunes,"<sup>16</sup> indicating that Norris had played all the written harmonies correctly but noticed that Coleman's improvised melodic lines no longer fit with the chord changes of the piece in question. The fundamental training of most jazz pianists seemed to be at odds with Coleman's vision for his ensembles. He later told Nat Hentoff, "I'd prefer it if musicians would play my tunes with different changes as they take a new chorus so that there'd be more variety in

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<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 22.

the performances... Rhythm patterns should be more or less like natural breathing patterns.”<sup>17</sup> It was after this recording session that Coleman decided to minimize his use of the piano in future ensembles. By 1960, he had completely abandoned it.

The record garnered considerable attention from the jazz community and attracted the interest of John Lewis of the modern jazz quartet, who came to see Coleman and Cherry perform with Paul Bley at the Hillcrest Club. Lewis then helped to get Coleman a deal with Atlantic records. Minus Bley, the group recorded *The Shape of Jazz to Come* for Atlantic in the spring of 1959.<sup>18</sup>

Both the name and music of the record signaled a new direction in jazz. The arrangements consisted of several pieces that Coleman had written incorporating elements of the bebop tradition but also some newer ideas utilizing a “rubato,” melodic direction that freed the rhythm section from the established tempo set by the horn section. Furthermore, the group presented a wide range of tempos on the album, showcasing their abilities to play not only extremely fast but also in a slow moving, ballad style. Both Ekkhard Jost and Peter Niklas Wilson refer to these kinds of pieces as “Coleman Themes.” The most prominent of these being the piece, “Lonely Woman,” which shortly after its conception started to make its way into the repertoire of other musicians and is now considered to be a standard. The melody to the piece contains reflects a stylistic choice which would become a trademark of Coleman’s style; the introduction begins with the rhythm section playing in a quick tempo, while the horns play a slow sustained melodic line. The character of Billy Higgins’ bright drumming is also a direct contrast to the melancholy of the theme carried in

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<sup>17</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 111.

the wind instruments. This idea of juxtaposition would become increasingly important for Coleman's work in the coming decade.

As for the record's reception, John Tynan's prediction that musicians would begin to take sides "either for, or against" Coleman's sound was beginning to prove true.<sup>19</sup> While *Something Else!* had merely raised a few eyebrows, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* was much more high profile, and quickly began to draw attention. Some artists, such as John Lewis, were strong proponents. Additionally, Coleman began to attract a great deal of attention from critics who placed him into circles where he could make important professional connections. One of these circles turned out to be the Lenox School of Jazz in Lenox, Massachusetts, which both Coleman and Cherry were invited to attend and where the two emerging musicians would get the opportunity to meet and perform with Max Roach, Bill Evans, Jim Hall and Kenny Dorham.<sup>20</sup> But Coleman's music also had a large share of detractors, most notably composer and trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, who resigned his position at Lenox due to the inclusion of Coleman and Cherry in the program.

After connecting with several New York musicians and critics in Massachusetts, Coleman secured a two-week engagement at the Five Spot in the Bowery neighborhood of New York City. The café was no stranger to more adventurous musicians and had even hired the avant-garde pianist Cecil Taylor as its first official engagement. It had also played host to the now famous collaboration between Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane in 1957, a booking that became Monk's first extended contract.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 66.

In similar fashion, Colman's gig with the venue was extended to nearly ten weeks. He continued to amass both supporters and detractors in this new environment. Leonard Bernstein declared Coleman a genius. Roy Eldridge said that he was "jiving." Charles Mingus and Miles Davis were at first critical, but later changed their minds. Coleman received a considerable amount of vitriol from established New York musicians who resented the idea that someone could start getting so much attention before he had "paid his dues" as a sideman or as part of a big band first. This sentiment even included members of the city's avant-garde community who saw Coleman as an outsider who had not needed to endure years of struggle as they had done.

Coleman was on the rise now. His second release for Atlantic, *Change of the Century*, had sold over ten thousand copies in only two months.<sup>22</sup> His work was also bolstered by the new found support of John Coltrane and the continued praise from critics such as Nat Hentoff, Martin Williams and LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka).

In 1960, Higgins was replaced by Ed Blackwell after the former had his cabaret card revoked. Blackwell's style was greatly influenced by New Orleans parade drumming, and this his take on Coleman's music injected it with a different, more jovial character. Additionally, the group's tempo variations tend to happen more fluidly when Blackwell is drumming.

The quartet toured steadily and then returned to the Five Spot, this time for nearly six months. The new quartet hit the studio to produce *This Is Our Music*. The record produced even more favorable reviews than the previous two. Music critic George Russell even referred to the record as "pantonal," a term originally coined by Arnold Schoenberg to describe the 12 tone method of composition.

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 112.

The band's activity was limited shortly after when Charlie Haden dropped out due to issues with substance abuse. They went on hiatus for the majority of 1960.

Coleman used this opportunity to study composition with Gunther Schuller, who had difficulty reconciling common musical practice with Coleman's own self-taught understanding of harmony.

He'd write things down and they'd never make any sense. He'd write B flat when he was really hearing D flat, and it was all screwed up. So he said "Let me study with you." He came to my apartment religiously every week for something like eight months—he never was late. All of that ordinary teaching he had gotten as a kid in school, none of that had worked, so I knew I had to think of some new, ingenious ways of breaking through this mental barrier that he had. It never quite happened.<sup>23</sup>

But Coleman's non-adherence to previously accepted norms was not necessarily seen as a hindrance in the eyes of Schuller. By 1961, he had edited a book of nine transcribed Coleman themes and penned the following in his introduction: "We believe it is precisely because Mr. Coleman was not 'handicapped' by conventional music education that he has been able to make his unique contribution to contemporary music."<sup>24</sup> Schuller believes Ornette Coleman's lack of traditional musical knowledge to be a strength and not an obstacle to his creative process. The sentiment was seemingly shared by the artist Eric Dolphy who had performed one of Schuller's compositions with Coleman, and later chose to join the recording session for what was to become *Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation* in late December.

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<sup>23</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 95.

The album, Coleman's most ambitious project to date, involved the creation of two individual quartets, which would simultaneously improvise one single, full album-length track. The first quartet's personnel included Coleman, Don Cherry, Scott LaFaro, and Billy Higgins. The second was composed of Eric Dolphy (bass clarinet), Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell, and the emerging trumpeter Freddie Hubbard. The result of this collaboration was a nearly 40-minute, collectively improvised piece. Over 50 years later it remains one of Coleman's most controversial recordings.

The recording is notable for a number of reasons. Most importantly, it marked a conscious departure from a compositional practice that Coleman had been employing since his emergence. Previously released Coleman compositions, despite containing several sections of free improvisation, begin with and return to a composed theme. No such theme is present anywhere in *Free Jazz*. The closest thing to any kind of shared melodic device is in the opening fanfares, where all the wind instruments play similar rhythmic ideas. The intense dissonance heard in these sections indicates that there was no pre-designed harmonic structure. The solo sections are also something of a departure even just by the parameter of their length. Coleman's solo alone is nearly ten minutes long. The remaining solo sections also occasionally feature quick interjections from the other instruments, something previously unheard on any other Coleman record. In terms of its category in the Jost/Wilson taxonomy, *Free Jazz* stands alone by method of composition. This totally improvised setting is not something that Coleman would attempt to record again until nearly a decade later.

In early 1961, the group was recording *Ornette On Tenor*, Coleman's last contracted recording date for Atlantic, when Cherry and Coleman got into an argument. Cherry decided to leave the group following the disagreement. Later that year, Scott LaFaro was killed in an



automobile accident near his parents' home in upstate NY.<sup>25</sup> For the remainder of 1961 and 1962, Bobby Bradford was hired as the band's trumpet player. Jimmy Garrison would fill in briefly on bass but would soon depart in order to become a member of John Coltrane's quartet. Right after finding permanent members David Izenzon and Charles Moffet on bass and drums, Coleman decided it was time to withdraw from the New York jazz scene.

To summarize, the 1950s and early 1960s saw Coleman's emergence onto the jazz scene and his acceptance on the fringes of the genre. He was soundly accepted as an avant-garde direction in the music by 1962, and by 1964, some of his ideas had begun to take root in mainstream jazz. For example, "Orbits," performed by the Miles Davis Quintet, uses some free improvisation in its solo sections, as do the live recordings from his now (in)famous performance at the Plugged Nickel in Chicago in 1965.

Attempts to analyze and understand Coleman's work often focus on this period. In spite of its reputation, most of Coleman's work from this time is still soundly based within a jazz context and constructed from at least fragments of jazz language. The Jost/Wilson taxonomy divides most of Coleman's work from 1958-1963 as belonging to the groups of "bebop derived themes" or "Coleman themes," the obvious exception being *Free Jazz*.

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<sup>25</sup> There is some inconsistency in the record at this point. Liweiler writes that LaFaro was killed in 1961, implying that Coleman hired Jimmy Garrison out of necessity. However other sources (most notably the discography by Cuscuna and Wild) indicate that *Ornette On Tenor* was recorded in March of 1961, three months prior to the accident, and released in December of 1962. An alternate explanation for Garrison's involvement is Coleman's contract with Atlantic Records. Since all of the musicians involved were Atlantic recording artists, and because Coleman had not yet found a permanent replacement for Charlie Haden, it is likely that Garrison was employed for Atlantic's studio dates while LaFaro was fulfilling obligations with Bill Evans and Booker Little, and the opposite would occur while Garrison was performing with the John Coltrane Quartet.

## 2.2 COLEMAN'S MUSIC 1963-1969

Between 1963 and 1965 Ornette Coleman made no public appearances and recorded no records. The retreat was unplanned and self-imposed. But unlike fellow saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who made several sabbaticals of varying lengths in order to hone his craft, Coleman's refusal to work was a result of his unwillingness to accept compensation that he deemed as less than what he was worth as an artist. He fired his booking agent and manager and attempted to market himself. The result was almost a complete failure. The sums that he asked for were seen as unreasonable by most club owners and booking agencies. After a while, Coleman reduced his public appearance fee to its pre-self-exile rate, but by then the buzz surrounding his music had subsided and most promoters or producers could not generate enough interest to justify hiring him.

Yet during his absence from public performance, Coleman undertook a few ventures to attempt to better his situation. He planned to open his own live music venue and start a music publishing company; both ideas fell through during their early stages.<sup>26</sup> He also used his new amount of free time to begin learning the trumpet and violin and never took a hiatus from composition.

Coleman returned to the New York jazz scene in January of 1965 with a three-week engagement at the Village Vanguard with David Izenzon and Charles Moffet.<sup>27</sup> The highlight of these performances was Coleman's newly invented violin technique, in which he played the instrument left-handed and bowed in an unusual circular motion.<sup>28</sup> The reception to this new music

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<sup>26</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

was kinder than what Coleman had grown accustomed to, and he received positive reviews and acknowledgements in both *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Soon after, he was commissioned for a score for use in the independent film *Chappaqua*, but the editors rejected Coleman's "Chappaqua Suite" in favor of several pieces composed by Phillip Glass and Ravi Shankar. He was however still paid a five-figure commission. He continued to compose wind music that was more akin to contemporary classical music than jazz and premiered "Sounds and Forms" for wind quintet in London in August of 1965.

The group's European tour was a great success and Coleman was named "Musician of the Year" in the English journal *Melody Maker*. They played engagements in Paris, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Berlin followed by two-weeks of appearances in Stockholm. The shows in Stockholm at the Golden Circle Club were recorded and the best takes were issued on Blue Note later that year as a two-disc LP.

The recording reveals just how much Ornette Coleman's ideas regarding composition had changed over the past few years. The group's performances are closer than any previous record (save *Free Jazz*) to a complete group improvisation. In several instances, Inzenzon plays the bass with a bow and gives the instrument a purely melodic role, a newly emerging tactic in jazz music. Similarly, the traditional restrictions of the drum kit as a rhythmic instrument are subverted by Moffet's playing, which frequently reacts to the lines of the pitched instruments with a coloristic approach. *Golden Circle* sold well in the United States, and the band was shocked to discover that they had garnered a much larger level of demand because of their European trip. Several performances were booked in New York and California shortly after their return.

Then, in September of 1966, Coleman began letting his son Denardo sit in on drums. At the time of the engagement at the Village Vanguard, the younger Coleman had been playing music

for only four years.<sup>29</sup> Soon after, he was brought into the studio to work with his father and Charlie Haden on what would become *The Empty Foxhole*.<sup>30</sup>

When *Foxhole* was released it drew considerable criticism. Most jazz drummers denounced it entirely. Shelly Manne called the record “unadulterated shit.”<sup>31</sup> Critics were confused as to why Coleman has chosen to include his son, who was only 10 years old at the time, on the project at all.

But the choice was consistent with Coleman’s new musical direction. As he had developed a more primitivist approach to his studies on the trumpet and violin, it made sense that he would expect the same from his rhythm section. Denardo’s presence was therefore desirable because he had not yet learned the accepted technique. In some ways, Denardo’s complete lack of knowledge of the proper drumming methods made him the perfect collaborator for his father. He had no preconceived notions of what constituted acceptable sound and usage of the instrument. Too much of this kind of thinking may have hindered the project though. *Foxhole* seems to lack direction in most of its passages. The idea was consistent with the philosophy, but Denardo probably was not yet ready. Despite the fact that his self-taught approach made him compatible with his father, his lack of experience is evident. The experiment with Denardo on drums was short lived. In 1967, Coleman reconstituted his trio and then made it into a quartet, adding Charlie Haden as a second bassist.

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<sup>29</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 120.

<sup>30</sup> Izenzon had refused to play on the record without his preferred collaborator Charles Moffet. Charlie Haden was available for the date but was having difficulties with heroin addiction and withdrawal.

<sup>31</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 121.

Coleman began devoting more and more time to his composition. In the spring he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, the first for jazz composition.<sup>32</sup> He had a premiere of an orchestral work, *Inventions of Symphonic Poems* at the UCLA Jazz Festival. Additionally, he had purchased an abandoned industrial loft at 131 Prince St in Manhattan in order to create something of a center for experimental musicians.

He named the loft “Astists’ House.” The place was soon frequented by several members of the NYC avant-garde community. Younger musicians like Anthony Braxton became regular guests.

As Coleman continued to find support from younger musicians, one of his first supporters, John Coltrane, died of liver cancer in 1967. The two saxophonists had planned to record an album together but the right opportunity never emerged.<sup>33</sup> The following year, Coleman began a project with the members of the former Coltrane quartet, Elvin Jones and Jimmy Garrison and fellow Texas-born saxophonist, Dewey Redman. The group produced two records, *New York Is Now* and *Love Call*. Both albums were produced and distributed by Blue Note. Peter Niklas Wilson describes these as “perhaps the two most underrated Ornette Coleman records.”<sup>34</sup>

Upon listening, it’s easy to see why these albums would draw some criticism. The Garrison and Jones rhythm section is just as strong as on any Coltrane record, but they had been accustomed to playing modally. Garrison, who had played with Coleman before, still displays his remarkable ability for propelling the time forward. Thom Jurek of Allmusic writes that Jones “sounds here like he doesn't know what to do with himself in the restrictive tempos,”<sup>35</sup> and is also

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<sup>32</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 129.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 132.

particularly critical of Coleman's violin playing. But the coloristic textures created by Jones underneath some of the slow Coleman themes create a sense of rhythmic tension which is only resolved when the band hits an up tempo piece. It could be argued that his drumming is an excellent complement to Coleman's compositions.

Likewise, the inclusion of Dewey Redman seems to encourage Coleman to look for new melodic material in his solos. In just the first track of *New York Is Now*, Coleman can be heard quoting several melodies and then twisting them around tonally. *Love Call* also features what could be considered Coleman's best work on trumpet. He uses an assortment of techniques including: squeals, splatters, slides, scoops, and trills. His tone is not full or warm, but the color is effective and the timbre is interesting.

The recordings satisfied Coleman's contract with Blue Note and he began to work without the backing of a record company. His next few albums would be issued as live recordings on a single record contract basis with Impulse. Even *Ornette at 12*, which would be marketed as a studio album, has moments where the audience can be heard clearly.

By the end of the decade however, Coleman had grown tired of the music industry's business practices. He had once again decided to feature Denardo (who was now 12 years old) on *Ornette at 12*, and had once again received a fair amount of negative criticism for the decision. He later remarked to John Litwieler:

I tell you, man, the music world is a cold world. Very cold! The way Denardo is playing now on the record, *Ornette At 12*, would be a novelty for any other race of people. Someone would have gotten in and said, 'We can make lots of money with this father and son,' the whole trip. Instead, they put it down... I have never in my life seen anyone explain

how and what I'm doing in music. But everybody knows that it's something that hasn't happened before, and that it's not important enough to back.<sup>36</sup>

He began to feel opposed in any creative decision that he made, criticized for his attempts to push his music forward, and weary of public performances in general. Preoccupied with the idea that record company's and concert promoters only wanted to exploit his music for profit, Coleman began to delve more and more into composition.

I don't feel healthy about the performing world anymore at all. I think it's an egotistical world; it's about clothes and money, not about music. I'd like to get out of it but I don't have the financial situation to do so. I have come to enjoy writing music because you don't have that performing image...I don't want to be a puppet and be told what to do and what not to do... When I can find some people that are in a position to accept me as a human being on my own terms then we can work together.<sup>37</sup>

He began to explore concepts created for larger ensembles using the melodies that he had created in the past. Soon, Coleman would find a label that would allow him to record them and was able to fund his new experiments. This would eventually lead to the most stable period of his musical development.

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<sup>36</sup> Litwieler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> Litwieler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 135-136.

### 2.3 COLEMAN'S MUSIC 1970-1979

1970 was the beginning of a rebirth for Ornette Coleman and his music. He had begun to expend a large amount of energy on his compositions and the development of his creative ideas. Artist's House served as a kind of anchor for the artist during these years while he worked without a record company. He began to experiment with the idea of using it for self-production. Both Anthony Braxton and Leroy Jenkins had moved in temporarily and used the space to record two LPs for their own Creative Construction Company.

Attitudes toward Coleman's music were beginning to change once again. By this time the Chicago based group the Association for Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) had begun to canonize some of his principles and compositions. Even conservative jazz musicians were at least working with concepts of modal music and moments of free improvisation; and when compared to the work of artists like Braxton, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, and Roscoe Mitchell, Coleman's music almost seems tame. If that wasn't enough of an indication of his newly found acceptance, later that year Coleman was invited to participate in a recording session with Louis Armstrong and other jazz notables including Miles Davis.<sup>38</sup>

Although he was performing less frequently, this shift in status brought about new opportunities. Coleman's group was hired to perform at the Newport Jazz Festival, one of the great bastions of the jazz establishment, and as the headliner for the Saturday afternoon event. It was this performance that led to Ornette Coleman signing a recording contract with Columbia.

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<sup>38</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 129.



When Coleman began to record *Science Fiction*, he had not released a studio record under his own name for over three years. In that time, he had not only rethought the ideas of his previous ensembles, but had begun to imagine new directions for his sound. The sheer variety of the performances captured during the three session dates in 1971 and one in 1972 caused Columbia (now owned by CBS) to try to cash in on them by issuing them separately instead of collectively as one double-LP as Coleman had originally intended.<sup>39</sup>

Two distinct core groups can be heard on *Science Fiction*, but there are seven unique combinations of musicians presented over the course of the album. The financial backing of Columbia allowed Coleman complete creative control of his music. He was able to hire whomever he chose to play.

Some of the names of the artists are hardly surprising. Both Bobby Bradford and Don Cherry were hired, as were Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins, and Ed Blackwell, all long-time Coleman collaborators. But the roster also includes two classical trumpeters, Carmon Fornaratto and Gerard Schwarg<sup>40</sup>, guitarist Jim Hall, and pianist Cedar Walton. Coleman's return to using harmonic instruments was unexpected, but not as astonishing as the inclusion of vocalists on four tracks, the Indian soprano Asha Puthli on "What Reason Could I Give?" and "All My Life," and blues singer Webster Armstrong on "Good Girl Blues" and "Is It Forever?".

The first core group is a re-visitation of the original Coleman quartet with Cherry, Haden, and Higgins. This combination is heard on three tracks: "Civilization Day," "Street Woman," and

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<sup>39</sup> Sony, who had purchased Columbia in 1980, released a double compact disk of these performances with alternate versions of some tracks in 1999. It was marketed as *The Complete Science Fiction Sessions*.

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 170.

“Country Town Blues.” The compositions are similar in structure to those recorded nearly a decade before, and use a bebop derived form, containing an in-head, solo section, and out-head.

The second grouping of musicians includes Bradford, Redman, and Blackwell. Haden plays bass for every track on the album. The music made by this group has the added characteristics of Coleman’s work after 1965, most noticeably “Law Years,” in which Haden performs the melody in a slow, rubato fashion before the full statement of the main theme by all the instruments. The result is reminiscent of Coleman’s work with David Izenzon and Charles Moffet, although arranged for a larger group.

The other pieces on the record use variations of the two core ensembles. “Happy House” for example, involves both drummers and both trumpeters. In the sheer variety of instrumental tracks on the record, *Science Fiction* recapitulates Coleman’s entire compositional career up to 1970. It has examples of bebop-derived themes, Coleman themes, and collective improvisations. The construction of tunes like “Law Years” display the distinct motives discussed by Ekkhard Jost.

These pieces adhere to Coleman’s previously designed formats, but here they are presented with a group of performers who no longer view them as experimentation. The musicians hired had been working with Coleman on and off for over ten years at this point. In terms of execution, the tracks are masterful. As the next generation of improvisers accepted Ornette Coleman’s music alongside the previous innovations of artists like Charlie Parker or even Duke Ellington; the style of improvisation required to perform these pieces was well known by the early 1970s.

However, Coleman also continued to innovate and refine his style with *Science Fiction*. Two of the recordings made use of nine-piece ensembles, the largest of his career up to this point, and five of the tracks use vocalists, something that Coleman had never previously experimented with. Of these vocal pieces, those made with Asha Puthli exhibit a new type of form and

construction. The term, “Coleman Ballad”<sup>41</sup> would seem to be appropriate to refine the Jost/Wilson classification scheme further. In short, these Coleman ballads are a subdivision of the Coleman theme but use neither contrasting motives nor a consistent juxtaposed rhythmic structure beneath the main theme. Instead, the pieces have clear melodic lines although there is still a lack of a consistent tempo or meter. It could be said that Coleman was refining his approach to melody by writing music that would need to support lyrics. Similarly, as the wind instruments in the band follow Puthli’s interpretation of the melodic line, it can be inferred that Coleman was attempting to recreate the “natural breathing patterns” that he experimented with in his earlier experiences with R&B music. The largest difference between these pieces and a typical Coleman ballad though is the apparent lack of improvised solos.

The use of Puthli’s voice in concert with the ensemble is also distinct. Each recording displays a different approach to the orchestration of the group. “What Reason Could I Give” and “All My Life” are both modified strophic forms, each ending with a coda. The former utilizes the vocal line in concordance with the melodic instruments in all phrases, while the latter breaks the ensemble up into sections in each strophe. All of this would support the idea that Coleman was attempting to minimize his activity in improvisation and live performance and pursue an artistic direction which focused on his notated compositions.<sup>42</sup>

Following the release of *Science Fiction* Coleman embarked on a much larger project. He started to pursue a dream that he had held for a number of years, a piece for symphony orchestra. The result was *Skies of America*, a piece for jazz quartet and orchestra. The work was scheduled

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<sup>41</sup> Wilson uses this term to discuss a thematic type of Coleman’s compositions.

<sup>42</sup> A more detailed discussion of Coleman’s vocal arrangements can be found in: Nathan A. Frink, *An Analysis of the Compositional Practices of Ornette Coleman as Demonstrated in His Small Group Recordings During the 1970s*.

to be premiered in London in 1972, but the British musicians union protested the event due to the inclusion of an American jazz ensemble performing alongside the orchestra and the concert had to be canceled.<sup>43</sup>

Then, during the recording of the piece at Abby Road Studios, Columbia refused to accommodate the length of the piece by issuing it as a double-LP. Coleman was forced to cut several sections in order to meet the industry standards. The relationship between the artist and the label deteriorated significantly. During an interview with *People*, Coleman remarked that he felt a consistent lack of support and that other artists were given much greater priority.

I'm so pissed off with Columbia. I was put in a situation where they're supposed to be humanitarians, aware of everything that's going on. But I didn't get the same interest in my music as Boulez did recording someone else's music. I didn't even get all of it on the record, only 40 minutes. The budget that Boulez could get for recording a Bartok piece—the rehearsal money—would've allowed me to finish my whole piece. I could've done my record exactly as I wanted to do it, and if it didn't sell, I would have still have had the privilege of knowing that they were *with* me.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, Columbia's dealings with Ornette Coleman were never intended by the label to be mutually beneficial. He was signed merely to be an impressive name on the label's artist roster. They were willing to tolerate his experiments up to a certain point but refused to spend more than they felt Coleman's reputation was worth to them. While his recordings were made and issued, the company did little in terms of promotion and marketing, expenses that would have substantially

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<sup>43</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 143.

<sup>44</sup> David Grogan, "Ornette Coleman," *People*, October, 1986.

added to the the cost of doing business with an artist who never really sold many records, at least not by their standards.

Originally conceived as one, monolithic movement, *Skies* was broken up into 21 separate tracks to better accommodate the expectation of potential jazz listeners at Columbia's insistence. All the titles of the individual tracks were conceived by the composer as an afterthought.

Regardless of the company's lack of support, the piece was generally well received. The conception of the music, created from several clashing themes, is reminiscent of Charles Ives. Other critics have called it a Copland-esque search for the next evolutionary step in American symphonic music.<sup>45</sup>

The work received its public premiere on July 4<sup>th</sup> 1972, two months after the recording session. The performance included the sections that needed to be cut from the record, bringing the total length up from a little over 40 minutes to nearly 54 minutes. It was included on the program of the Newport Jazz Festival, which had now moved to New York City. The artists included the American Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Leon Thompson with the current incarnation of the Ornette Coleman Quartet featuring Redman, Haden and Blackwell.

The record manifests several distinct Coleman-isms. The jazz ensemble accompanying the orchestra uses two drummers playing contrasting rhythmic material. Likewise, the themes depicted on *Skies* are often recycled from previous compositions e.g. "All of My Life" from "All My Life," or "The Good Life" formerly known as "School Work." Coleman's bluesy saxophone lines soar over the top of the orchestra on several of the sections. The album's liner notes also contain the

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<sup>45</sup> Tom Jurek, "Skies of America" *Allmusic*. 2000.

first mention of a word that would soon become known as the definitive method behind Coleman's musical creations, "harmolodic."

"Skies of America" is a collection of compositions and orchestration for symphony orchestra based on a theory book called The Harmolodic Theory, which uses melody, harmony, and the instrumentation of movement of forms... The writing is applied to harmolodic modulation, meaning to modulate in range without changing keys."<sup>46</sup>

These remarks were penned by Coleman in 1972 with the LP release of *Skies*, and later rehashed in Litweiler's official biography of Coleman in 1993. Yet this theory book has still yet to appear. Despite the lack of further explanation, Coleman's notes on *Skies* could be said to be his first attempt to explain his compositional practices, an effort to help his listeners to better understand his musical perspective. This is also an indication that Coleman was attempting to gain greater acknowledgement as a composer instead of as a jazz saxophonist or a band leader, and was putting himself into a position where he would again draw fire as an artist, not only from of his lack of common practice musical background but also because of his ethnicity and class. It therefore became a necessity to codify some kind of methodology to justify his interest in creating Western classical music. This is not to definitively state that there is no "real" harmolodic method, but instead an attempt to explain why Coleman had made no mention of it before his forays into symphonic music. Coleman clearly understood the difficult cultural space that he was trying to navigate. He remarked to J.B. Figi that,

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<sup>46</sup> Ornette Coleman and Nat Hentoff, Notes to *Skies of America*, Columbia, 1972.

I really wrote the music because I have the ability to write the music. I wasn't trying to change my class or category or become blacker or whiter. I was just doing something that I could do. And yet, I haven't had any, really, white people that's in the field try to relate to me on a musical level. It's like they were trying to discourage me that there's something that I shouldn't think about.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to feeling discouraged from creating and performing this music by classical musicians<sup>48</sup>, Coleman regarded Columbia's decision to break *Skies* up into several short pieces with the same level of skepticism and disappointment. CBS had, after all, insisted that the album be released by the jazz division, rather than its classical music division. Supposedly this was to encourage radio airplay, but Coleman later said that, "they were trying to keep it from having the image of a symphony. I realize now that it was another social-racial problem."<sup>49</sup>

Even though Coleman's audiences were getting a revised picture of him and his work, Coleman had stated previously that "I've always thought of myself as a composer who also performs music."<sup>50</sup> This is likely why such blatantly disrespectful attitudes toward him or his music were particularly hurtful. But nevertheless, for the remainder of the decade Coleman continued to devise new means of expanding his compositional palette.

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<sup>47</sup> J.B. Figi, "Ornette Coleman, A Surviving Elder in the Brotherhood of Those Who Make Music," *Reader*, June 1973.

<sup>48</sup> Coleman has mentioned in several interviews that the symphony musicians that were hired made negative remarks about his compositions and his ability to write music.

<sup>49</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 145.

<sup>50</sup> Figi, "Ornette" 6.

The next big opportunity came in 1973, when Coleman, music writer Robert Palmer and author William S. Burroughs traveled to Jajouka<sup>51</sup>, a small village in the Rif Mountain range of northern Morocco. Dwelling in Jajouka is a family of musicians who can trace their ancestry back to Persia; the oldest compositions of these musicians were composed over 1000 years ago.<sup>52</sup> These pieces are linked with superstition and are frequently reported to have healing powers. The musicians of Jajouka were first introduced to most of the western world through their association with Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones and William S. Burroughs. The latter had lived in Tangiers in the 1950s, and described them as a “4000-year-old rock band” in his novel *Naked Lunch*.

Coleman arrived to perform with the musicians at the beginning of the annual Bou Jeloud festival in January. He was met by approximately 30 musicians playing *raitas*, a native double reed instrument, and various sizes of drums. Coleman had some previously conceived themes that he had composed specifically for the occasion, and both he and Palmer were included in the festivities as performers. Following several days of music making at the festival, Coleman was invited to a cave that had once served as a religious shrine. Working with the musicians, he composed “Music from the Cave” for drums, a native violinist, performers of the *gimbri* (a three-stringed zither), and himself on trumpet. According to Palmer, the theme that Coleman performed

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<sup>51</sup> In each of the recordings by Coleman and Brian Jones, as well as the Litweiler biography, the name has been spelled “Joujouka.” However, the official website of the musicians spells the name of the village “Jajouka.” To complicate matters, a rift has formed in the ranks of these musicians over the last 30 years. Two groups of performers now claim the true lineage of the Jajouka/Joujouka tradition, each using a different spelling. However, the group using the spelling “Jajouka,” performed with Ornette Coleman in London in 2009. Since leadership of both sects has changed several times, it is unclear if this group is of the same lineage that Coleman worked with in 1973. According to journalist Richie Toughton, who has documented this conflict, the “Jajouka” spelling is also more phonetically accurate.

<sup>52</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 149.



was “a perfect bridge from his idiom to theirs...All of the musicians on ‘Music from the Cave’ were playing in one world, and I think that world was equally new to all of us.”<sup>53</sup>

Several recordings were made in the cave and at the festival, which were kept by Coleman and brought back to New York. He and Palmer selected the best examples and sent them to Columbia to be released as a double LP. Unfortunately, 1973 was also the year in which Columbia decided to purge most of its jazz roster. Coleman’s contract was terminated and it would be over ten years before he would be able to get the Jajouka tapes back. Some of the recordings would be released on *Dancing in Your Head* in 1977.

Despite the setbacks, Coleman’s experiences in Jajouka had made a deep impact on his conception of music. In the village he had encountered a group of musicians that fulfilled his dream of a great improvising ensemble more completely than any other that he had worked with in the past. Accounts of the Master Musicians describe their ability to change tempos and begin new musical sections with almost telepathic precision. Undoubtedly Coleman was inspired to pursue his next musical direction because of his association with them. Moreover, the acceptance he felt among that community of musicians there may have provided greater encouragement than what he had previously experienced.

The thing that really fascinated me is the atmosphere of how people get along. I didn’t see anyone getting uptight about not relating to somebody. That was really beautiful to see a person could maintain his own identity without trying to get you to like him and yet get along with you.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Drew Franklin, “Ornette in Joujouka: Playing in the Register of Light,” *Village Voice*, June 1987.

<sup>54</sup> Litweiler,, *A Harmolodic Life*, 152.

It's easy to see how this type of fellowship was a welcome relief for Coleman amidst the turmoil he had been experiencing with the executives at Columbia. It is also likely that his time in Jajouka was the first time that he had actually felt welcomed into a musical community without first being tested and opposed.

After Coleman's return to New York, he was hired for a series of lectures at Queensborough Community College and a ten day seminar at the Creative Music Studio—one of jazz's most prominent institutions of higher learning during the 1970s. As if this wasn't enough of an indication that he was receiving a new degree of institutional respect, the fall brought about an even larger surprise as Coleman was awarded another Guggenheim Fellowship<sup>55</sup>

These years were not without their share of hardship however. Ed Blackwell, then Coleman's regular drummer, had begun to suffer from serious kidney problems, and was unable to perform due to the need for almost constant dialysis. The problems were also mounting for Coleman's creative dwelling at Artists House. For years he had used it as both an occasional performance space and a rehearsal studio. The floors that he owned were filled with music at almost every hour of the day or night, which quickly became a problem when the other floors were converted into apartments. After several disputes with his neighbors regarding the noise, Coleman was evicted from the bottom floor of 131 Prince Street. He hired John Snyder as a lawyer in order to keep the other two floors but after several court battles, gave up and sold his spaces.

What started as a vision of artists and musicians building a unique, creative community ended with a series of battles that Coleman deemed to be as motivated by his race as they were by

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<sup>55</sup> Litweiler,, *A Harmolodic Life*, 153.

the sound of his ensembles. The newly trendy Manhattan neighborhood had managed to shut down Artists House by the end of 1974.<sup>56</sup>

Due to the departure of Redman and Haden, who had left to perform with Keith Jarrett, Ornette Coleman's group now consisted of Billy Higgins, and bassist Sirone (Norris Jones). Additionally, Coleman had returned to using harmonic instruments in his ensembles, in this case in the form of blues guitarist James "Blood" Ulmer. Ulmer had already performed with several modern jazz artists and was the first guitarist ever to perform with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.<sup>57</sup> In any case, he seemed to adapt well to the harmolodic approach. Because of the ease in which he played by ear, Ulmer's role in the ensemble was one of instant modulation.

With the addition of Ulmer the music was slowly changing. The shift would likely have happened faster if the group could find a consistent bassist. Sirome was replaced by Haden, who in turn was replaced by David Williams, then David Izenzon was hired in 1975. A change was also made on the drums as Coleman once again hired Denardo, now 19, as a fulltime band member. The frequent changes were likely an indication that Coleman was looking for the perfect players to complete his new group concept. Ulmer recalled "After Ornette decided he liked the guitar, we tried quite a few drummers, and he would ask for my suggestions about who we should play with. I thought playing with Denardo would be great. I think that he always really wanted Denardo to be the drummer."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 156

<sup>57</sup> Ken Micallef, "James 'Blood' Ulmer: Blues Album of the Year (*Birthright*)". *Down Beat*, December 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 157.

Coleman was now in unfamiliar territory with the utilization of electric instruments in freely improvised music. However, unlike the fusion musicians who were performing at the same time, Coleman's drive to use these instruments was mostly from the perspective of an orchestrator.

I began to realize that the guitar had a very wide overtone, so maybe one [electric] guitar might sound like ten violins as far as the range of strength. You know, like in a symphony orchestra two trumpets are the equivalent of 24 violins. So when I found that out I decided, well, I'm going to see if I can orchestrate this music that I'm playing and see if it can have a larger sound—and it surely did. So around 1975, I started orchestrating the same music that I was playing, that I've always written, for the kind of instrumentation that I was using.<sup>59</sup>

It is obvious that Coleman was still looking at his music with the model of the orchestra firmly in mind. It seems that electric amplification was an acceptable substitute for the instrumentation that he had originally aspired to create through a large ensemble. Furthermore, Coleman was still experimenting with adding additional musicians to the quartet to complete the group's sound.

The bass spot was finally filled when Coleman was introduced to a young Jamaaladeen Tacuma (Rudy McDaniel) in Philadelphia in 1975. By then Denardo was unavailable, and Ulmer had moved on to other projects, but they were replaced by Charles Ellerbee, a session guitarist who made his living playing in disco bands, and Ronald Shannon Jackson, who had previously worked with Albert Ayler. Bern Nix, a recent graduate from the Berklee College of Music, was added as a second guitarist. The group went into the studio to record *Dancing in Your Head* and *Body Meta* at the end of the year.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 159.

One of the tracks recorded, “European Echos,” shows just how much Coleman’s approach to composition had changed over the last decade. This piece was originally recorded with the trio at the Golden Circle with Moffett and Izenzon. Another track, “Theme from a Symphony,” is a once again a reworking of the opening half of “School Work.”<sup>60</sup>

One of the consequences of Coleman’s Jajouka experience was that it proved that creating a mix of improvisation and orchestration in an ensemble work was possible. Tacuma recalled what Coleman’s general compositional concept was during the time of the recording.

We’d often be in a frame of mind where we would try to play in a certain way to please him, but on the breaks we’d be playing other things we knew, and he’d say ‘Why don’t you guys play like that when we play?’... Basically what we do is compositional improvising in which each person acts like a soloist. We work from a melody in a tonal point, and anything that you play has to be equal to the melody or better. If you play anything less than the melody, you have to go to the doghouse [laugh]. The rhythm pattern, the melodic structure of it, anything you improvise has to be stronger than the original melody.”<sup>61</sup>

Through Tacuma we get a glimpse into what Coleman was teaching his band about harmolodics. Tacuma’s statement about these improvised lines being “equal or better” than the melody, is likely a statement about how Coleman wanted his performers to use the composed melody as a point of departure for their musical explorations. The idea of creating something new based upon a preconceived structure is the basic premise of jazz improvisation. But it would seem that unlike most of bebop, which is harmonically driven, the nature of harmolodics is dictated by

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<sup>60</sup> Transcriptions of these melodic lines are provided in the next section.

<sup>61</sup> Jon Liebman, “Jamaaladeen Tacuma” Forbassplayersonly.com, January 20, 2014.

the thought or impression of an original theme and can include new melodic directions as well as harmonic ones.

Additionally, Coleman also showed a degree of interest in the personalities of musicians and the styles of music that they each respond to. His role as the elder musician of the ensemble was akin to the experiences of other artists that had found themselves not only in positions as educators of younger generations of performers, but as a bridge between old and new. For instance, Miles Davis's excursions into amplified music had occurred only after the hiring of young artists like Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, Jack DeJohnette, Michael Henderson, and others. Musicians who, like Henderson, came from a background other than jazz, were especially helpful in forming a new sound for the group.

Coleman had already hired two guitarists (Ulmer and Ellerbee) that were not primarily jazz players. Furthermore, his previous associations with rhythm and blues bands during his youth in Texas had given him some experience in using his sound to connect with diverse audiences. Modernizing the sound of the ensemble with electric instruments and styles borrowed from more popular forms was in part a way to regain that connection. Jackson's drumming on *Body Meta*, which frequently incorporates bass drum hits on every strong beat, like those found in pop and disco music, would support the conclusion that the band was attempting to reach a wider audience, as would the decrease in free-time and overall rhythmic freedom when compared to Coleman's earlier ensembles. The stricter sense of time on the *Body Meta* version of "European Echoes" seems to remove some of the whimsical side of the piece heard in the trio recording and the piece "Voice Poetry" is almost a straight-ahead funk groove.

These changes can also be partially traced to Jajouka. At the Bou Jeloud festival Coleman saw a music that was complex and respected but at the same time embraced and understood by the

general population of the village. This was a music that the people wanted to participate in. It's easy to see why he felt that he might be able to achieve the same, and why he thought that his music could eventually be appreciated by everyone.

In late 1975 Coleman's friend and lawyer John Snyder founded the Horizon record label as a subsidiary of the successful pop and R&B company A&M Records. In 1976 he produced a series of duet recordings with Charlie Haden and other great artists including Alice Coltrane, Paul Motian, Keith Jarrett, and finally Ornette Coleman. He was then hired by Coleman to try to find a buyer for the two records that the group, now called Prime Time, had made in the previous year. Snyder tried to sell the recordings to Columbia, but they passed. He was however able to issue *Dancing in Your Head* on Horizon in 1977.<sup>62</sup>

But being Ornette Coleman's manager was no small job. In that same year, Snyder attempted to start an independent record company, with Coleman as a partner and named after the loft at 131 Prince Street, Artists House. Snyder had about ten employees but they were always busy handling Coleman's problems, which left little to no time to record new music or to even handle the business of issuing and distributing Coleman's work.<sup>63</sup> As if that wasn't frustrating enough, Snyder recalls that Coleman frequently turned down good paying work because promoters were often unwilling to meet his demands. He felt that his time was better spent composing than in making public concerts.<sup>64</sup>

*Body Meta* was issued by Artists House in 1978, but the band's lineup was in flux again and Coleman's financial situation was beginning to turn sour. His living situation was erratic, and

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<sup>62</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 163

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 165.

he was moving from apartment to apartment in the Bowery neighborhood. He had only made one public appearance in 1977. 1978 wasn't much better. Even though Coleman had been invited to perform at the White House that year for President Carter, he still had to finance and promote the premieres of his own classical compositions. Litweiler notes that for a composer and artist who had contributed so much to the development of American music, the entire situation was preposterous.

Coleman's dual status at this point is perplexing. Coleman had long considered himself to be a composer, but his recognition by the general public was still as a jazz musician. Similarly, while his practices from the late 1950s and early 1960s had been somewhat canonized by this point and pieces like "Lonely Woman" were being adopted even by the newly emerging "young lions" of the genre, his social position had not changed accordingly. Had Coleman been a white, conservatory trained composer for instance, he could have found a number of opportunities for getting his works premiered through commissions via orchestras, ensembles classical music societies, or other avenues. Coleman was unable to benefit from the recognition of his work as "art" by patronage systems that may have otherwise allowed him to present his work through more established philanthropic avenues. He also felt actively discouraged from trying to pursue acknowledgement as an orchestral composer. As a Black artist he was expected to create "jazz music," and because of his lack of a university education in music he was labeled as an entertainer and a primitive.

Additionally, the music created by Prime Time was difficult to categorize as anything other than "fusion" by record labels despite the differences in organization and orchestration between Coleman's work and that of groups like Weather Report or the Mahavishnu Orchestra. The fact that Coleman's former record label, Columbia, had refused to release *Skies of America* as anything



other than a “jazz” album speaks volumes about the agency and level of control that was afforded to its composer.

Even Coleman’s best advocate within the industry, John Snyder, had been unable to get the music with him and the Master Musicians of Jajouka released on anything other than a jazz label (Horizon). The attitude was one of “we have a Black musician that plays the saxophone, so throw him in the box with all of the other jazz artists.” This was done regardless of how the album sounded or how the composer conceived of the work itself.

Accolades and awards were no different; Coleman had won two Guggenheim fellowships by 1980, and each of them had been awarded on the basis of his career as a “jazz composer.” The music created by Prime Time placed Coleman again in a difficult position between artistic communities. He was not a jazz musician, not a classical musician, not a popular musician. His old music had been accepted but this new music was increasingly challenging in terms of marketing and promotion. Ironically, Coleman’s efforts to connect with audiences again had led to his ostracism from the jazz community and the perceived complexity of the new works had alienated the realm of popular music. His finances were largely still erratic. His records were not selling, performance dates were rare, and the lack of a traditional music education left Coleman without the option to pursue a teaching job, ironically coinciding with the blossoming of the first academic jazz programs within higher education. The late 1970s found him in increasing monetary distress.

Regardless of Coleman’s lack of a role in any educational institution, he had become a mentor for the more forward leaning members of the jazz community (Leroy Jenkins, Anthony Braxton, and David Murray) and by 1979 had even begun to take on a few private students. Many members of the Artists House staff were amateur musicians and were frequently given lessons in

harmolodics.<sup>65</sup> In March of that year, Coleman and Prime Time secured a performance on the NBC variety show, *Saturday Night Live*, through the influence of a student from the Prince St. days, Kunle Mwanga, who was currently acting as his manager. Mwanga then booked Coleman in a series of performances in Japan including a complete rendition of *Skies of America* with the NHK Symphony Orchestra (the Japanese equivalent of the French Radio-Television Orchestra). A new Prime Time album *Of Human Feelings* was also recorded and was planned to be released via Mwanga's association with the Japanese label Trio, along with some previously unreleased material recorded in Paris in 1966 and 1971. The Prime Time material features Calvin Westin standing in for Ronald Shannon Jackson as the second drummer. Coleman even began negotiations to found a record label as a Trio subsidiary called "Phrase Text," but the agreements were never finalized. *Of Human Feelings* was then picked up by Antilles, but several other recording sessions from that period were never issued.<sup>66</sup> As a result, Mwanga resigned as Coleman's manager.

By the end of 1979, Prime Time's music was beginning to make waves in the music industry. Another generation of Coleman alumni was also starting to pursue new directions into the "free funk"<sup>67</sup> sound. Jamaaladeen Tacuma had already formed his own ensemble and so had Ronald Shannon Jackson. James "Blood" Ulmer formed the Music Revelation Ensemble, which would release a debut record the following year. A more experienced group of musicians associated with Coleman had also been active. Blackwell, Cherry, Haden, and Redman had formed a group called "Old and New Dreams" in 1976 and performed Coleman compositions and original works in a similar style to that of the earlier groups led by Coleman. After 20 years in the public

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<sup>65</sup> Litwieler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 167.

<sup>66</sup> Litwieler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 170.

<sup>67</sup> A term coined by music journalist Scott Yanow.

eye, Coleman had transitioned from a jazz iconoclast to one of the music's largest influences. The next decade would serve both to solidify this position but also bring Coleman into the realm of popular culture. Additionally, it would provide greater recognition of his legacy as a composer in all streams of American music.

### **3.0 COLEMAN'S MUSIC 1980-2015**

#### **3.1 1980-1993 COLEMAN AS A JAZZ ICON**

At the close of the 1970s, Coleman found his musical projects were becoming increasingly difficult to fund. By the 1980s, he had little available capital to put into premieres of his work and opportunities to perform or record with Prime Time were infrequent. This was slightly ironic considering the general increase of interest in jazz during the early 1980s.

However, this upturn was spearheaded by performers whose sound hardly resembled that of Coleman's newest projects. In fact, the rising "young lions" generation of improvisers had much more in common with the styles of jazz pioneered in the 1950s and early 1960s, e.g. the modal concepts of Miles Davis, the hard bop rhythms of Art Blakey, and the resurrected soulful swinging of Cannonball Adderly among others. This new return to "accessible" jazz was praised by artists and critics alike. But some musicians like Miles Davis dissented from what they deemed to be a regression of artistic exploration. Davis himself referred to the sound in general as "warmed over turkey."<sup>68</sup>

In this resurgence of bop, traditionally minded artists were once again flourishing. Art Blakey, who had recently hired young performers like Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Javon Jackson, and Terence Blanchard was recapturing some of his lost audience. Dizzy Gillespie also benefitted from this new level of interest, gaining more exposure via performances with emerging

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<sup>68</sup> Ashley Kahn, "Miles Davis and Bill Evans: Miles and Bill in Black & White," *JazzTimes*, September 2001.

artist like John Fadis, Arturo Sandoval and a cameo appearance on the Stevie Wonder recording “Do I Do.” Miles Davis had likewise opted to come out of retirement and begin work with a slew of young musicians, refining his fusion style by incorporating the sounds of newly developed synthesizers and musical idioms borrowed from popular music.

This post-modernist approach was not limited to just bop musicians. A new interest in big bands and swing oriented approaches was also emerging. Brian Setzer’s group, The Stray Cats, employed a rockabilly approach to great extent, enjoying a stream of several charting singles.

But with these new possibilities also came a new level of public expectation. The general public, largely through the influence of vocal critics and artists like Stanley Crouch, the Marsalis brothers, Gary Giddins, and popular entertainers like Bill Cosby, began to associate these stylistic directions as the purest form of jazz. Coleman was almost simultaneously both abstractly praised for being a jazz master and ignored for not fitting the usual profile that came with the position by divorcing from his early sound and choosing to stay with the electric model he had adopted in the 1970s.

Coleman’s reputation for canceling appearances also played a part in his exclusion and lack of work. By 1981 Denardo was booking the band’s engagements and helped to negotiate contracts and alleviate the general mistrust between his father and the venues. It was frequently rumored by this time that Ornette Coleman was a difficult artist to work with and would cancel a performance obligation at the slightest indication of what he deemed to be disrespect, or deception on the part of the promoter or venue.<sup>69</sup> Sid Bernstein of Island Records claimed that the elder

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<sup>69</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 183.

Coleman had made demands that were “unrealistic in this business unless you’re Michael Jackson.”<sup>70</sup>

Coleman’s lack of good fortune was apparent in other areas of his life as well. The IRS audited him in the early 1980s for failure to pay income tax.<sup>71</sup> The issue was only resolved when John Snyder intervened and the two were allowed to meet with the federal prosecutor rather than dealing with the investigators. Snyder, who had kept meticulous records of Coleman’s finances during his time at Artists House, was able to help negotiate a settlement. He reflected on how all of Coleman’s money was channeled back into creating art

They saw that he didn’t cheat anybody—it’s not because he kept money and spent it on himself. At the same time [that] he’s making \$100,000 to \$200,000 a year, he’s living in my back office, and taking sponge baths with cold water. I don’t know where it all went—it didn’t go for drugs, it didn’t go for liquor, it didn’t go for girls. It all went for music, that’s all I can say.<sup>72</sup>

In 1982, Coleman moved into an old school building on Rivington Street in the Lower East Side. He had ambitiously planned to make the school into an “art embassy” for musicians and international creative artists, combined with a music school and an art gallery.<sup>73</sup> But a series of break-ins plagued Coleman’s new residence, two of which caused Coleman physical harm after he interrupted the thieves and was beaten while they made their escape. A blow from a crowbar,

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<sup>71</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*. 166.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Shirley Clarke, *Ornette: Made In America*.

received during the second incident, had punctured one of his lungs and left him unable to play for nearly six months.<sup>74</sup>

Later that year the decision was made that Denardo would take charge of all Coleman's management and booking arrangements. This change was motivated due to the inability of Island Records' Sid Bernstein to market any of Coleman's new recordings successfully. The last recording had sold for less than it had cost to make and Coleman was once again growing bitter in regard to how his music was being handled. At least Denardo could be trusted to have his father's best interests in mind.

The following year saw the beginning of new opportunities from an unexpected location. A major performance venue had been completed in downtown Fort Worth, Texas. Named The Caravan of Dreams, the facility included a 212 seat auditorium which was wired for sound recording with new 24 track digital equipment, a martial arts and dance studio, a rooftop garden, and a 400 capacity nightclub.<sup>75</sup> Kathelin Hoffman, the artistic director of the Caravan, had decided that Coleman, a native son of Fort Worth, should be the opening act of the new performance center. Coleman decided that the event would be the perfect setting for the American premiere of *Skies of America* and the Fort Worth symphony orchestra was contracted.

September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1983 was designated Ornette Coleman day in Fort Worth.<sup>76</sup> The orchestral work was premiered and the following two nights included performances by Prime Time. Coleman's performances during that week are documented on the live recording *Opening the Caravan of Dreams*. The venue also witnessed the premiere and recording of another Coleman

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ornette Coleman, Liner notes to *In All Languages*, Caravan of Dreams Productions CDP 85008, 1987.

<sup>76</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 183.

work, *Prime Design/Time Design*, dedicated to Buckminster Fuller. Both recordings would be released two years later.

The collaboration between Coleman and the Caravan was fruitful for a few more years. Coleman was contracted to compose and perform music for Hoffman's plays which premiered at the venue. He additionally became friends with the chairman of the board at the Caravan, Johnny Dolphin, for whom he composed a piece for strings, percussion and two trumpets. Coleman's band members were also able to benefit from the association. Jamaaladeen Tacuma for example, used the venue on several occasions, frequently creating his own versions of tunes performed with Prime Time.

By 1985 Coleman's profile had risen again. He was making many more public appearances and Denardo's ability to manage both his father's temperament and the venues' concerns were creating new opportunities. That summer, Real Art Ways, a Hartford based institution, presented an "Ornette Coleman Festival." The week was declared "Ornette Coleman Week" in Connecticut, and the governor declared Coleman had "changed the face of modern jazz through the development of harmolodic music."<sup>77</sup> Prime Time performed in the afternoon on the opening day of the festival. Three of Coleman's pieces for chamber ensemble were performed and there was a special preview screening of Shirley Clarke's documentary, *Ornette: Made in America*.

The increase in celebrity also attracted younger musicians to perform with Coleman. Charlie Haden was able to connect Coleman with guitarist Pat Metheny and a group was formed along with Denardo and drummer Jack DeJohnette. The group, performing under the name "Endangered Species," gave a concert on New Year's Eve at the Caravan of Dreams. An album,

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<sup>77</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 186.



*Song X*, was released in June of 1986,<sup>78</sup> Coleman's first studio release in nearly seven years. The band went on tour for the remainder of the year, notably hitting college campuses and other serious venues, signifying that Coleman was not only experiencing an increase in exposure but gaining the reputation as an artist that he had sought for several decades.

The following year saw a reunion with Don Cherry, who had been living in Sweden since the mid-1970s, and with whom Coleman had not recorded since the sessions that produced *Science Fiction* and *Broken Shadows* in 1971. The original quartet with Cherry, Haden and Higgins recorded half of a double album; Coleman plays both alto and tenor saxophones. The other half of what was to become *In All Languages* is composed of the Prime Time group performing brand new compositions.

In other matters, Coleman had managed to sell the old school building on the Lower East side to a real estate developer for roughly three million dollars.<sup>79</sup> He was also beginning to see an upturn in interest for his classical compositions. Oboist Joseph Celli presented a two-night performance of Coleman's chamber works at Weill Hall in New York, and composer John Giordano re-orchestrated *Skies of America* to be premiered in Verona, Italy with Prime Time and a full symphony orchestra. Giordano had reflected that the biggest problems with Coleman's writing had not simply a matter of his outsider status, but also the way he related to the musicians in the orchestra.

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<sup>78</sup> A discussion of this record is presented in the next section.

<sup>79</sup> Mandel, *Miles, Ornette, Cecil*, 115.

As it was scored before, the piece literally irritated the symphony players. A violinist who's spent his whole life polishing the sort of tone you need to play Debussy doesn't necessarily like being told to scrape his \$20,000 instrument with the wrong side of the bow...I've tried to rewrite it in such a way that any orchestra can play it without resentment, and with only minimal rehearsal, provided they're conducted by someone completely in tune with Ornette's thinking. It seems to be working. The Verona symphony [usually] plays nothing but Puccini and Verdi. They loved it.<sup>80</sup>

1987 was also the year of the first International Conference on Jazz Studies, held at the University of Bologna. The event topic was designated as the music and career of Ornette Coleman. Similarly, Coleman was voted "Jazz Musician of the Year" in *Down Beat's* annual reader's poll.<sup>81</sup>

With this increase in visibility, Coleman began to attempt to attract attention beyond the spheres of classical and jazz music. His next studio project, *Virgin Beauty*, featured a three-track cameo from the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia. Coleman had attended a Dead concert a number of years ago with his friend and fellow avant-gardist Cecil Taylor. While there, he was awed by the legions of devoted fans, dedicated to the loose, jam-bandish style of the concert. "They could have done anything up there and those people would have screamed. I thought, if these people could be into this, they could dig what *we're* doing."<sup>82</sup> The album was conservative by Prime Time's usual standards. The complex rhythmic experimentation is very subdued, partially because of the more pop-oriented nature of the compositions and partially due to the absence of Jamaaladeen Tacuma. The change in bass seat produced a greater number of conservative harmonic choices, and fewer running, improvised lines.

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<sup>80</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 183.

<sup>82</sup> David Fricke, "Ornette Coleman's Time," *Rolling Stone*. March, 1989.

Prime Time had been Coleman's longest lived experiment and its personnel had remained steady for over 10 years. Both guitarists, Nix and Ellerbee had been with Coleman from the outset in 1975. Tacuma had been the bassist since 1978, and Weston and Denardo were the drummers. Most of these artists had dedicated their careers to performing Coleman's music, and at some points even lived with him and eaten at his table.<sup>83</sup>

However, *Virgin Beauty* had sold more copies in its first year than any of Coleman's other recordings, and Coleman now seriously considered making some more artistic and stylistic changes.

In 1988, Coleman decided to hire guitarists Chris Rosenberg (from the Manhattan Conservatory) and Ken Wessel to replace Nix and Ellerbee. A tabla player, Badal Roy was hired in place of Calvin Weston. The double quartet concept that had inspired Coleman since the early 1960s was abandoned in favor of a differently structured and perhaps more conservatively minded rhythm section.

Again breaking with his traditional approach he hired keyboardist David Bryant (the first pianist hired for one of Coleman's groups since 1958). The motivation for these changes was not only the overall change in sound however, as Coleman now had a group of classically trained musicians at his disposal that would be willing and ready to rehearse and study his harmolodic concepts with a degree of seriousness and discipline unseen in previous incarnations. As he told Jeff McChord:

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<sup>83</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 105.

I really only had two good harmolodic bands. The first was in '75, the second in '95. The one in '75 was teenagers, and they had just started on the instruments so I had a first opportunity to assure harmolodics with them, and the second harmolodic band was made up of people who had been playing classical music.<sup>84</sup>

The new Prime Time group would begin touring in Europe and Japan for much of 1989 and 1990, refining the harmolodic concept. Coleman, who was once again working with CBS records, had chosen to remain out of the studio for much of that time and would not release anything under his own name again until 1995. This is likely why he refers to the version of Prime Time established in 1988 as “the '95 group.”

But even though Coleman wasn't releasing any recordings, other, younger musicians were beginning to canonize him. “Lonely Woman” had already been recorded several times by a variety of different performers, most notably: The Modern Jazz Quartet, Branford Marsalis, Lester Bowie, Old and New Dreams, and the Kronos Quartet. 1989 saw the release of John Zorn's *Spy Vs. Spy*, an album completely composed of reimagined reductions of classic Ornette Coleman compositions. These younger musicians and improvisers had accepted Coleman as a member of the jazz tradition and were capable of viewing his work as having the same artistic merit as artists from earlier periods of jazz. A renewed interest in the classic Coleman sound did not go unnoticed and the original quartet was again reunited for a brief tour in 1990.<sup>85</sup>

In 1991, Coleman was hired to play and compose music for the soundtrack for the film adaptation of William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, directed by David Cronenberg. The soundtrack

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<sup>84</sup> Jeff McChord, “Independent Yet Empathetic: Jazz Legend Ornette Coleman,” *The Austin Chronicle*. November 22, 1996.

<sup>85</sup> A bootleg of this group's performance in Reggio Emilia, Italy was released as *Reunion 1990* in 2010 on the Ais record label.

features a rare appearance of Coleman performing a jazz standard, Thelonius Monk's "Misterioso," in addition to his saxophone solos with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Coleman was a logical choice, having also spent a significant amount of time in Morocco, the land of Burrough's most eccentric period. Later that year, Prime Time made its first New York City performance in nearly four years at the JVC Music festival.

By this time, the new Prime Time group had begun to expand its harmolodic mission to include guest artists and even extra musical phenomena. Coleman's vision of the harmolodic theory as a blueprint for artistic creation in any realm was tested through the incorporation of Japanese vocalist Mari Okuba and later, body piercing specialist Fakir Musafar. This was to broaden the range of the method and to codify it as a tool for multimedia and multicultural synthesis.

Money seemed to be much less of a restriction than in the past, as Coleman was touring more extensively than in any period since the 1960s. 1993 saw performances at Germany's Jazz Jamboree, and a guest appearance with the Grateful Dead at Alameda Coliseum in Oakland, CA. He was also beginning to see royalties as well. The record label Rhino had recently purchased the right to issue all of Coleman's early Atlantic recordings as an anthology. The collection, *Beauty Is A Rare Thing: The Complete Atlantic Recordings of Ornette Coleman* was released that same year.<sup>86</sup>

It would seem that after three decades of effort, Coleman's work was finally being completely accepted into the jazz culture. Additionally, he was seeing accolades for his classical works and other projects along with a host of new opportunities. A renewed interest in jazz during

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<sup>86</sup> The anthology is currently out of print.

this period, may have eventually led to this resurgence of appreciation. The younger generations, through their explorations of Coleman's ideas, had held a referendum on whether or not his music would stand the test of time. By the mid-1990s it was certainly clear that his artistic endeavors were a lasting contribution to jazz and American music as a whole.

### **3.2 1994-2015 ORNETTE COLEMAN AND POPULAR HARMOLODICS**

After a string of festival dates in Europe and the US, Coleman decided enough was enough with CBS records. He began to once again pursue the idea of creating his own label that had fallen short with Artists House in the 1970s. The process was accelerated by a \$360,000 MacArthur grant which indirectly led to a recording contract with Verve. The deal gave Coleman complete artistic freedom via a subsidiary label, Harmolodic Records. The deal also allowed Coleman to reissue old material using Verve's production and distribution resources. The first recording of the newest incarnation of Prime Time was created in 1994 and released the following year as *Tone Dialing*.

Live performances now were also expanding to incorporate other artists who, to Coleman at least, embodied the core principles of harmolodics. The group's set breaks at the 1994 San Francisco jazz festival were filled by live body piercing demonstrations by Fakir Musafar. Coleman explained his reasons for this to Steve Dollar: "The whole concept of *Tone Dialing* was an idea we got together by trying to find people that do the same thing we are doing, in their own

way, trying to find someone who is involved in communication or something that will give the viewer feedback to themselves.”<sup>87</sup>

1994 would also see the premiere of the world’s first harmolodic ballet, *Architecture In Motion*, in Cologne, Germany. The performance featured a chamber orchestra, and eight dancers from different cultural and artistic backgrounds. The work showcased the abilities of the dancers to perform in various cultural contexts, and in true Coleman fashion, they improvised both individually and with each other. No choreography was devised prior to the performance. Coleman elaborated that he wanted these performers to think of new ideas that might be outside their training or their usual comfort level. “How many dancers have the opportunity to dance in a ballet without being called a folk dancer...or a tap dancer...or a belly dancer? These are titles that don’t necessarily describe what a person does. It only tells you what territory you should be in.”<sup>88</sup> By removing any preconceived choreographed elements and letting these dancers act on feeling and instinct, Coleman is putting his compositional philosophy into practice in other realms of artistic exploration.

Coleman was frequently working with pianists again as well, either Geri Allen or Joachim Kühn in live performances. Allen was also hired for two studio dates that produced *Sound Museum: Three Women* and *Sound Museum: Hidden Man* in 1996, released on the Harmolodic Label. Coleman worked as a sideman for her on *Eyes In the Back of Your Head* in March as well. She remarked that Coleman had a hand in helping her think about the piano in a different role. “The sound was more important than the notes, though technical prowess was important, too. It’s

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<sup>87</sup> Steve Dollar, “The Lightning Rod: Some Call Him Genius, Others Fraud” *Down Beat*. March, 1996.

<sup>88</sup> Phrasetext Inc. Ornette Coleman: Architecture in Motion. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FutdXQkBvKo>. Accessed 2/10/2015.

very much like your first try at double-dutch—what not to do, how not to reduce what’s there, but contribute something to help propel the music.”<sup>89</sup>

Allen describes the her harmolodic philosophy as it was relevant to her in this conversation but her interaction with the theory is largely informed by Coleman’s new level of refinement which included a new interaction and direction related to sound and a personal concept.

I think that every person, whether they play music or don't play music, has a sound--their own sound, that thing that you're talking about. You can't destroy that. It's like energy. Your sound, your voice, means more to everyone that knows you than how you look tomorrow. You might grow a beard or shave your hair. They say, "I can't recognize you." But as soon as you talk, "Oh yeah, it is you!" It's the same thing. If it's that distinctive, then there must be something there. It's amazing that everyone has their own sound. Only actors are the ones that try to cover—when they imitate somebody—but then they're imitating that sound.<sup>90</sup>

Through this perspective we can see why Coleman began to integrate performance art into his harmolodic concerts. His high regard for personal expression led him to support and incorporate acts that seemed to embody the spirit of his work. His unique direction in music had instilled in him an ability to recognize and understand other artists that might also be viewed as misfits. By “the audience feeding back to themselves” Coleman may be referring to the innate subjectivity of art; not necessarily attempting to subvert expectations for the sole sake of undermining his audiences’ awareness, but daring them to question why the artistic event is considered to be bizarre in the first place. In creating such programming, Coleman is once again asserting a challenge to

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<sup>89</sup> Ted Panken, “For Geri Allen’s Birthday: A Jazziz Feature Article from 2010.” Blog Post. 6/12/ 2014. <https://tedpanken.wordpress.com/2014/06/12/for-geri-allens-birthday-a-jazziz-feature-article-from-2010/>. Accessed 1/31/2015.

<sup>90</sup> Michael Jarrett, “An Interview with Ornette Coleman,” *Soundtracks: A Musical ABC*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.



the hierarchy of what can be considered to be art, just as he posed a challenge to what could be considered to be jazz in the previous decades.

This value for personal expression and an individual approach can also be tied to why his band members seem to have such diverse views when discussing the theory, and why Coleman seems to be so vague when talking to interviewers. It can be inferred that he not only wants each performer to have an individual approach, but values each distinct impression of the theory.

The trend toward bridging his music with performance art continued for a few more years. In fact, the mid-1990s were Coleman's most active period since his emergence. He released three records on Harmolodic in only a two year span, and once again began to make cameo appearances on CDs released by others.

Joachim Kühn replaced Allen as the quartet's fulltime pianist in 1996 after duo appearances with Coleman in Verona. A second performance was recorded and subsequently released on Harmolodic as *Colors: Live From Leipzig* in 1997.<sup>91</sup>

Kühn's approach to harmolodic playing differed widely from that of Geri Allen. While Allen's playing is relatively sparse and linear, with a focus that could be described as a complement to Coleman's improvisations, Kühn plays much more aggressively. He frequently dazzles the listener with displays of classically informed virtuosity. His partnership with Coleman was the first duet performance that Coleman had been willing to be a part of since the collaboration with Charlie Haden on *Soapsuds* in 1977. Similarly, Kühn's background as a classical pianist was more attuned to the direction that Coleman's music seemed to be taking in regards to Prime Time as

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<sup>91</sup>Video excerpts from the performance in Verona are available on YouTube.com  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaJF5\\_6MvCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YaJF5_6MvCQ)

well. It signifies that Coleman was once again attempting to move away from carrying the moniker of “jazz musician,” even as the genre was finally showing him the appreciation that he had long sought. Distancing himself from Geri Allen and other notable performers that carried that label was one way to step outside of what he may have deemed to be a limited position. Interviews from that time tell a similar story. As he told Michael Jarrett, “Originally, I wanted to be a composer. I always tell people, I think of myself as a composer.”<sup>92</sup> The premiere of other works like *The Country That Gave the Freedom Symbol to America*, by the Julliard Ensemble showed that the rest of the musical world were also starting to take notice of Coleman’s compositional abilities.

1997 saw the beginning of even greater public acknowledgment and awareness of Coleman’s contributions by the jazz establishment. A four-night festival entitled “Civilization: A Harmolodic Celebration” presented the entire range of Coleman’s musical abilities at New York’s Lincoln Center. The New York Philharmonic performed *Skies of America*. A multimedia performance led by Prime Time with guest appearances by Laurie Anderson and Lou Reed was given on the third night. The festival would also feature dancers, rappers, and video as well as a reunion of the surviving members of the original quartet.<sup>93</sup>

That same year Coleman was the subject of another celebration, this time in Paris, where he invited Jacques Derrida to accompany him on stage and recite text during his improvisation. The attempt at collaboration backfired however, as the audience booed Derrida from the stage.<sup>94</sup>

What motivated Derrida to accept Coleman’s invitation to join him on stage that night remains unclear, especially since Derrida’s attitudes toward improvisation are often used to

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<sup>92</sup> Jarrett, *Soundtracks*, 120.

<sup>93</sup> Don Cherry died of liver cancer in October of 1995.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce King, “Review of Colin Nettelbeck, *Dancing with DeBeauvoir*.” *API Review of Books*, 43 June 2006.

critique jazz and improvised music. But Coleman's harmolodic philosophy does precisely what Derrida's works deem impossible to convey through improvisation, ignoring and subverting the fundamental "laws" of western music.<sup>95</sup> In effect, Coleman's tendency to "deconstruct" the assumptions and definitions of jazz may have been appealing and attractive to him. This interest in the music also led Derrida to interview Coleman in July.

Coleman's musical egalitarianism was beginning to spread beyond the realm of jazz and classical music. His work now involved dancers and philosophers and popular musicians as well. A recording session with Rolf Kühn (Joachim's brother) on clarinet rounded out 1997.

The following year saw more accolades and invitations. Coleman was inducted into the French Order of Arts and Letters, and *Down Beat* named him "Artist of the Year" in its annual international critics' poll.

He was featured as the main event of the 1998 Umbria Jazz Festival in Italy. Again Coleman performed a mixed media set with dancers and video accompanying their live music. This time a contortionist was also added to the ensemble. Coleman then shared the stage with fellow alto saxophonist Lee Konitz and performed a duet version of "All the Things You Are" as an encore.

A second performance at Umbria incorporated sounds of several different musical cultures; most notably four Sardinian vocalists and two Indian percussionists punctuated by a so-called "astrophysicist"—a musician adding digital samples.

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<sup>95</sup> Nettelbeck, Colin. *Dancing with DeBeauvoir: Jazz and the French*. Victoria: Melbourne UP, 2004.

Coleman explained the incorporation of popular and world music elements as an attempt to subvert the cultural hierarchy of sound. It was an attempt to show that all artists could occupy the same musical space without judgments of value or an effort to merge styles into one, fused, westernized entity. “You don’t have to change your language or change your style in order for someone to appreciate what you’re doing artistically...The kids are going to be born—and there will be those as old as myself—who will be able to enjoy the true human expression without any ethnical discrimination.”<sup>96</sup> Coleman’s distrust of globalization was apparent in the ways in which he approached the music of other cultures and integrated his art with technology.

As for technology, the inventors I have most heard talk about it are Indians from Calcutta and Bombay. There are many Indian and Chinese scientists. Their inventions are like inversions of the ideas of European or American inventors, but the word "inventor" has taken on a sense of racial domination that's more important than invention—which is sad, because it's the equivalent of a sort of propaganda.<sup>97</sup>

Coleman was aware of how his music, particularly when it bore the label of “jazz” was subject to a specific hierarchy which, in Western culture placed classical music at the top of the ladder in terms of significant artistic achievement.<sup>98</sup> Attempts by many late 20<sup>th</sup> century critics, musicians, and philosophers had attempted to elevate jazz from a relatively low position to the level of a significant cultural achievement. They also strove to divorce jazz from its original

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<sup>96</sup> Timothy Murphy (tran.) “Jacques Derrida Interviews Ornette Coleman—The Other’s Language” [www.theendofbeing.com](http://theendofbeing.com) 3/16/2006. <http://theendofbeing.com/2013/03/06/jacques-derrida-interviews-ornette-coleman-the-others-language>. Accessed, 2/1/2015.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> The ideas of European/white American exceptionalism and artistic imperialism have been examined extensively in a number of texts, notably Timothy Taylor’s *Beyond Exoticism* and Amiri Baraka’s *Blues People*. This dissertation is not a comprehensive discussion of these ideas. It merely asserts that Coleman was aware of his particular place and was actively seeking ways to change this status.

position as popular, and instead reframe it as African American art music, even going so far as to name it “America’s classical music.” They spurned the incorporation of technology into jazz; sometimes even showing revulsion toward previous innovations by fusion pioneers e.g. Miles Davis, Weather Report, the Mahavishnu Orchestra, resulting in a kind of revisionist history in which these attempts to assimilate new idioms into the music resulted in the dilution of its intrinsic, artistic character. While this new Afro-centric viewpoint on jazz emboldened and strengthened the case for the music as a unique Black art, it did little to change the current value system, which still comparatively placed jazz between Western classical and popular in terms of importance.<sup>99</sup>

However, while the Marsalis brothers, Keith Jarrett and others rejected the new technological direction being asserted in popular music, Coleman seemed to embrace the phenomenon. Time after time his ensembles incorporated period technological trends into his characteristic sound. In doing so, he was asserting that borrowing from the popular and assimilating its strengths did not diminish the music. Similarly, accepting the contributions of artists from other cultures, without providing them with specific direction that undermined their musical heritage, allowed for the free exchange of musical ideas on stage. By going in the opposite direction as his fellow jazz artists, Coleman was once again demonstrating that artistic choices are egalitarian and value is not only culturally determined but also self-determined. He was rebuffing a musical hierarchy that had devalued his art, and by proxy the art of all Afro American musicians who were placed in the jazz category.

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<sup>99</sup> Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism*, Duke University Press: 2007.

The festival at Umbria may have been something of a swan song for Prime Time. The following years saw less activity by the electric (now digital) group and increased performances of Coleman's smaller acoustic ensembles. At the turn of the century, Coleman was once again collaborating with Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins in a trio format and working on some slightly larger projects with Indian percussionists dubbed the "Global Expression Project." Both of these acts were commissioned for a concert in Battery Park on June 1, 2000 as part of the touring jazz festival sponsored by Bell Atlantic. The four-city tour also included dates in Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. Sony, which had purchased most of Columbia's jazz holdings by this time, also released the music from *Science Fiction* and *Broken Shadows* as a double-CD, the way that Coleman had originally intended to present the record.

Once again keeping pace with current technology, Coleman broadcast his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party via webcast on harmolodic.com. The event included a duo performance by Coleman and Haden as well as a short concert by Jack DeJohnette, Charnett Moffett<sup>100</sup> (son of Charles Moffet) and Dewey Redman.

Coleman once again found himself in new contexts that year as well. Singer songwriter Joe Henry had recruited the saxophonist for his album *Scar*. "Richard Pryor Addresses a Tearful Nation," features a Coleman alto saxophone solo recorded in an airy, low-fi style. The track "Pryor Reprise" also showcases Coleman's improvisation, this time over a more ambient soundscape. The album marked a directional shift for Henry into an R&B, soul-centric approach to the more traditional folk, blues sound that he is known for. Henry sought after Coleman for the sole purpose

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<sup>100</sup> The younger Moffett had already recorded with Coleman on the two albums that featured collaboration with Geri Allen in 1997.

of bringing his characteristic sound to the record, stating that his presence was nearly central to completing the concept of the album.

I had a dream. A “vision,” I’m tempted to say. But that would sound too mystical, and make me sound like...I don’t know, like...Sting. Not something I can afford at this particular stage of my life and career. But damn it, I did have one, and it came out of nowhere. And the vision had a voice, and the voice spoke a word: Ornette. It didn’t need to speak the other word, for I knew... I needed Ornette Coleman’s musical voice to complete the song with which I was at that precise moment struggling. Ornette, a towering figure in the history of modern jazz, and one of its chief architects. You can look it up yourself and that’s what it will say. Even he wouldn’t argue that, though he doesn’t volunteer such information himself; because he has always and only operated on a plane that exists far above the conventions of what is called “[j]azz.” Jazz pretends, of course, to have no constraints. But in a world that presents itself as an ideal of freedom, Ornette has been too free for the likes of many. And he has paid a price for that, having been as much maligned as exalted.<sup>101</sup>

Henry’s writing, despite its obvious romanticism, speaks volumes about the level of Coleman’s acceptance, and now even influence, within American music. While the jazz world had finally truly accepted Coleman as an official member and a great innovator over the last decade, popular musicians had also been fascinated by his music for an equal amount of time. Henry, born in 1960, is of the same generation as the third wave of avant-garde jazz musicians (David Murray, Geri Allen, Matthew Shipp) for whom, Coleman’s innovations served as a foundation and confirmation of a bolder and more experimental direction for their own music. These artists became aware of Coleman’s trajectory after the initial controversy had long subsided, and thus had no aversion to his harmolodic concept. By the time they were active, working musicians; the “new thing” had already become the old thing, and was as much a part of the tradition of jazz as any other previous style.

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<sup>101</sup> Joe Henry, “The Ghost in the Song,” *joehenrylovesyoumadly.com*: 10/17/2001. Accessed. 2/11/2015 <http://joehenrylovesyoumadly.com/the-ghost-in-the-song/>

This was reinforced by singer/guitarist Lou Reed, originally of the Velvet Underground, who frequently claimed the Coleman had a deep influence on his sound and changed the way that he thought about music. Reed often cited “Lonely Woman” as the first piece of jazz that had a significant impact upon his understanding of form and composition.<sup>102</sup> In 2002, he too invited Coleman to record with him on an album.

*The Raven* is Reed’s nineteenth studio recording and features Coleman on alto saxophone for one track, “Guilty.” Reed’s context for Coleman’s improvisation is vastly different from Henry’s in that *The Raven* is mostly a rock album. A hard rock guitar and drums riff fuels the track that Coleman is featured on, while Reed recites an interpretation of an Edgar Allen Poe poem and Coleman’s whimsical saxophone lines dart in and out, completely independent of the rest of the band.

Reed had in fact been inspired by Coleman’s music for a long time, even going so far as to cite him as a primary influence on his guitar technique. He has even repeatedly stated that his piece “European Sons” was an endeavor to recreate a Coleman-esque sound on the guitar.<sup>103</sup> As far back as the 1970s, he began involving Don Cherry to perform in stage shows with his band and even recording on another Poe-themed piece, *The Bells*, with him in 1979.

But Reed and Henry were not the only popular artists to be inspired by the antiestablishment attitude of the jazz avant-garde, or even Coleman’s signature sound for that matter. The innovations of free jazz musicians were a major influence on the sound of 1960s rock in general and artists like Jimi Hendrix had planned to start collaborating with John Coltrane, or

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<sup>102</sup> McChord, “Independent,” 1996.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Bernays dir, “1959: The Year That Changed Jazz.” Accessed 2/16/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=34&v=dou3aSZmEg0>



Miles Davis. The politics of the avant-garde were also attractive to the young punk movement of the late 1970s and venues like the Fillmore West would routinely host both psychedelic bands, and artists like Roland Kirk and Cannonball Adderly, sometimes even on the same night. In later decades, the influence of these artists on the emerging young rockers was greatly acknowledged. Sun Ra performed on the same stage as Sonic Youth in 1992 and Charlie Haden was invited to perform with the Minutemen.

While the difference in sound and tactics is obvious, both Coleman and these groups of young rockers were developing a process of deconstructing the music that had been created by previous generations. Punk rock took a trajectory similar to the jazz direction of Albert Ayler in which energy; raw intensity, and the message of the music took precedence and instrumental virtuosity, at least in a traditional sense, was discarded as a measuring stick for artistic validity. Both free jazz artists and punk musicians attempted to distance themselves from the aesthetics thrust upon them, despite differences in motives, and subscribing to a different philosophy of what it meant to be a musician and an artist.

Prime Time's characteristic sound was also held in high regard by the more adventurous rock musicians. Captain Beefheart and Frank Zappa (who had already codified a distinct guitar driven sound) used Coleman's explorations as a confirmation of their own, already conceived direction. There are remarkable similarities between the guitar sounds of these groups and those of Bern Nix on several of the early Prime Time recordings, and after 1975 both of the rock groups move closer to the direction of free tonality. Coleman's performance on *Saturday Night Live* in 1979 had certainly also helped to bring him into the minds of rock musicians.

Since Coleman had always existed on the fringes of popular consciousness, his incorporation into it was also not an especially drastic move. But by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century public

awareness of his music was likely at an all-time high. In 2001 he had been awarded the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperial valued at \$140,000. He was awarded the Dorothy and Lillian Gish award valued at \$250,000 in the following year. His likeness had also made a small cameo on the popular animated series *The Simpsons* in February of 2003<sup>104</sup>. Although Coleman does not provide the voice for the character, his appearance was a significant statement regarding the level of attention and recognition being given to the artist by the mainstream media.

2003 also saw the birth of a new group concept, the premiere of a new acoustic quartet with Denardo, and bassists Tony Falaga and Greg Cohen. The band made their first appearance at New York's JVC Jazz Festival. Both Falaga and Cohen were classically trained musicians, Falaga was affiliated with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and Cohen is best known for his work with saxophonist and composer John Zorn.

In some ways, the group was a re-visitation of the double-quartet concept that had informed all of Coleman's work with Prime Time and other projects. Cohen and Falaga put their own spin on the plucking and bowing methods employed by David Izenzon from Coleman's trio period, and bring to mind the contrast in techniques used by Haden and LaFaro from *Free Jazz*. But the two artists are also informed by music from other periods from Coleman's career, sometimes providing bass melodies or countermelodies in a similar fashion to Jamaaladeen Tacuma. In many ways the group is a synthesis of the sounds utilized by all previous Coleman ensembles.

The group made appearances throughout the second half of 2003, and over the next two years gave concerts at the University of Michigan,<sup>105</sup> Carnegie Hall, Disney Hall, the Newport

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<sup>104</sup> Coleman appears briefly in episode 302, "Barting Over." The character has no lines in the episode but is shown receiving an award and holding his saxophone.

<sup>105</sup> Excerpts are available via YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdEqDcbO5E8>

Jazz Festival, and a European tour with stops in France, Italy, Norway, and Slovenia. The performance in Italy was recorded and subsequently released in 2006 as *Sound Grammar*.

*Sound Grammar* was Coleman's first recording under his own name since the sessions that produced the two *Sound Museum* albums in 1996. An interesting note about the CD is that all the compositions were new, with the exceptions of "Song X" and "Turnaround" at the time of the album's release. Also of note, is that "Sound Grammar" had now become the word for what Coleman had originally called "Harmolodics." He explained this idea to *JazzTimes*:

I just lately started using that phrase 'Sound Grammar, but it's been in my mind ever since I've been playing music. Although I do know that in the emotion of human beings, sound is growing: in revolutions, in purpose, and most of all, in freedom. A person can say a word that they know what it means without you knowing what it means, and speak to you in a way that you get a meaning from it.<sup>106</sup>

It would seem that "Sound Grammar" may have fit Coleman's criteria for interaction better than harmolodics. If one recalls that harmolodics is a synthesis of the words, melody, harmony, and motion it becomes obvious that the term is limiting, and probably too narrow for Coleman's now evolved sense of his musical aesthetic which was had also involved extra-musical spectacles. This is not to say that "Sound Grammar" is a revolution in harmolodics, but just a further revised, and perhaps more vaguely defined term for the same set of ideas.

In this statement, Coleman shows himself to be more concerned with how emotion and thought are conveyed through sound. In the same interview he also demonstrates a greater degree

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<sup>106</sup> Ornette Coleman, Liner Notes to *Sound Grammar*. Sound Grammar, 2006.

of self-awareness than in early interviews discussing harmolodic facets, and communicates his ideas to greater effect.

...it also works in the way that adjectives, pronouns and conjunctions do in language. The main thing is that the word 'improvising' is the only word that can be used by anyone in any form they want with different results. What I think improvising is, is adding to the quality of the melody and making a much more interesting idea out of it, collectively. That's what I think improvising is. I don't think it's broken down further. Although the rhythm instruments are probably the truest form of improvising, because you don't think of having whole steps, you don't think of harmonies, you don't think of movement; you think of pure rhythm. Like your heartbeat: Does it beat in 4/4 time? 8/4 time? It's not even measured like that, right? It just beats.

Every note that has a title has so many frequencies to represent that note. But that's not true of your voice. We're speaking, right? But we don't have to tune up to talk.

It's worth noting that the human voice is a rather sophisticated thing to emulate. There's no other creature that has an intellectual relationship with rhythm, the way your emotion allows you to appreciate things. The sad part about that is that when you think of races of color, you think of rhythm, and when you think of races of non-color, you think of class. But there's nobody without rhythm; there are just people who don't know how to make it fit, because of the quality of what it's supposed to represent. But with sound, you don't have that problem. And for some reason sound is beginning to be a very important emotional quality, in the voice, in the drums, in the instruments, and in the revolution of ideas<sup>107</sup>

The example of a heartbeat as a measurement of time is pertinent to how Coleman conceives of musical space and why his practices had long rejected notions of strict tempo and single-metered time. Coleman's willingness to forgo standard musical practice in favor of emotional directness had also been repeatedly shown through his lack of regard for standard intonation practices and his ideas of musical "unison." He sees no need to resolve or harmonize

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<sup>107</sup> Nate Chinen, "Ornette Coleman in His Own Language." *JazzTimes*. November 2006.

“correctly.” Instead, he phrases his perception quite elegantly and romantically by relating to one of the first measures of time, the human heartbeat.

Unlike the moniker “harmolodics,” the idea of “Sound Grammar” also seems to encompass Coleman’s feelings about social status, race, gender, and what he had in previous interviews described as a “caste system of sound.”<sup>108</sup> It also shows his egalitarian philosophy, of music being central to the human condition and not restricted to any one group in particular. According to Coleman, anyone can make music, but rules and value judgments consistently get in the way of creating an open, global artistic community. This was the philosophy that he had employed to great effect through Prime Time’s multimedia shows and the interactions that produced *Tone Dialing*. Harmolodics was once again expanding.<sup>109</sup>

Sound Grammer was also the name of Coleman’s new record label. While Verve had overseen Harmolodic Records, Sound Grammar was a completely independent entity. It was owned by Coleman and managed by James Jordan and Denardo as a family business.<sup>110</sup> Coleman’s past dealings and struggles with record companies had made him bitter toward the act of recording and releasing music, but now, in taking the same step that had brought him some peace with public performances again, he was finally able to have complete creative control over all facets of his work.

Coleman received the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for *Sound Grammar*, which he shared via special citation with his friend and fellow jazz innovator, John Coltrane. Coleman had been skeptical of previous awards that he had been given, even be so candid as to say “I’m so tired of being sold as

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<sup>108</sup> Andrew Purcell, “Free Radical,” *The Guardian*. June, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Further analysis of these changes to the harmolodic method in the 1990s are explored in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.1)

<sup>110</sup> Mandel, *Miles, Ornette, Cecil*, 197.

a product for being who I am, but not for what I really *do*. I'm tired of being juried by people who don't know what I'm doing."<sup>111</sup> But this award was different. The committee that had chosen Coleman for the Pulitzer included David Baker, Ingrid Monson, Quincy Jones, and advocate of contemporary music John Schaefer. When he gave a post-award interview to the *New York Times*, Coleman remarked, "I'm genuinely surprised and happy...I'm glad to be a human being who's part of making American qualities more eternal."<sup>112</sup>

The Pulitzer brought even more attention to Coleman's public image. In 2007 he received lifetime achievement award at the Grammys. He was even acknowledged and satirized on comedian Stephen Colbert's late night television program where a sound clip from the record was played. Later that year Coleman was invited to perform at the internationally famous, multi-genre music festival Bonnaroo in Manchester, Tennessee.

Unfortunately, Coleman was unable to finish the band's set. About halfway through the performance, Coleman fainted on stage due to dehydration and heat exhaustion from the nearly 100°F weather.<sup>113</sup> The event resulted in a brief hospital stay for the 77 year old saxophonist. Shortly after this performance, Cohen left the quartet in order to devote more time to performances with John Zorn's Masada ensemble. He was replaced by Al McDowell.

Despite its brevity, the performance at Bonnaroo confirmed a theory that Coleman had formulated nearly two decades earlier when he had first discussed his interest in the Grateful Dead, as well as the shared sonic qualities of his Prime Time group and those performers who practiced a "jam band" style during their live shows. It was the feeling that if audiences could enjoy the

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<sup>111</sup> John Rockwell, "Ornette Coleman Album Wins 2007 Pulitzer Prize," *The New York Times*. April 16, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> "Ornette Coleman Hospitalized After Bonnaroo Collapse," *www.Billboard.com*, accessed 3/1/2015. <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/1051484/ornette-coleman-hospitalized-after-bonnaroo-collapse>

sound of these free style rock bands, they should also be able to understand and find satisfaction in the music made by his ensembles. At Bonnaroo, the proof was clearly seen in videos of the event in which the crowd begins to groove and sway to the sound of the new group. Another performance in mainstream rock venue, the Flynn Theatre, in Burlington VT resulted in a standing ovation for Coleman and an encore after five to ten minutes of thunderous applause. The popular online music publication JamBase reviewed many of Coleman's concerts over the next few years, encouraging young music aficionados and scenesters of the jam genre to get out and see the group. Several reviews mentioned that the performance was nothing like they would have expected from someone billed as a "jazz musician." "Within the first 30 seconds it was clear that this would not be any sort of typical jazz concert. The band came flying out of the gates at breakneck speed with a rollicking free-form composition that sounded like it was going to run off its rails at any moment!"<sup>114</sup>

The idea that this audience would appreciate Coleman's characteristic sound is not especially surprising. Coleman's innovations during the 1970s may have had a direct influence on the music of jam bands in the following decades. The free form approach to the music is similar, as is the idea of egalitarian musical exchange and unrestricted creativity. Coleman was acknowledged as a major influence on Jerry Garcia during their collaboration on *Virgin Beauty* in the late 1980s.

2008 brought more jazz festival dates in Vienna, Croydon, and Heidelberg. The waves of public attention brought by Coleman winning both a Grammy and a Pulitzer in previous years had

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<sup>114</sup> Eric Podolsky, "Review of Ornette Coleman at Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco CA" November 2009, *JamBase.com*. Accessed 3/4/2015.

sent record companies scrambling through their vaults to look for any unreleased material. Jazz Row had decided to reissue a Parisian performance by the quartet from 1971, on which the sound quality is much better than the recording of the same group in Belgium in 1969 (which had also been reissued by Gambit earlier in the year).

The companies weren't just interested in Coleman recordings. In fact, that year saw an increase of releases that could be related to Coleman in any way. Several European groups attempted to cover *Free Jazz*, and a 1974 recording of Ted Daniel's band at Artists House was purchased from the French company Sun Records, and issued on Porter.<sup>115</sup> ECM was even putting out unreleased material from Old and New Dreams on digital formats. It would seem that Coleman's recognition also increased his image as a commodity. The previous year, the French label Minimum had even recruited several artists to perform versions of one of Coleman's most famous works, "Lonely Woman," on a compilation record that featured only that piece. The album was released as *8 Femmes Seules* and included eight different, mostly piano, interpretations of that composition.

In 2009 Coleman was given a different kind of award when he was chosen as the curator for that year's Meltdown Festival in London. The festival, which incorporates visual and performance art in addition to live music, has named a different artist as its curator/director since its inception in 1993. In being given this honor, Coleman joined the pop culture ranks of artists like Elvis Costello, David Bowie, Laurie Anderson, and Patti Smith, who had all previously curated the event. Coleman was the first jazz musician to be given the chance. His selections



included The Roots, David Murray with the Gwo-Ka Masters and Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Yoko Ono and the Plastic Ono Band with Sean Lennon and Cornelius, Yo La Tengo, Baba Maal, Moby, Bobby McFerrin, Patti Smith and The Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra & Tra-La-La Band, the Master Musicians of Jajouka, Charlie Haden and the Liberation Music Orchestra, Carla Bley, Robert Wyatt, and The Bad Plus.<sup>116</sup> The wide variety of jazz, world music, popular and classical acts made Coleman's festival one of the most successful in the series. His group performed as the closing act, sharing the stage with other performers from the series. John Fordham of the Guardian named the event one of his "50 Great Moments in Jazz" and said of the festival:

...it brought musicians of such different persuasions into a jubilantly ragged harmony. It also inspired public gratitude for a career devoted to the spiritual and unifying qualities of music, pursued by an artist who refused to be trapped by rigidities of style, orthodoxies of technique, or preaching of a cultural clergy. Coleman once said: "I'm not trying to prove anything to anybody. I just want to be as human as I can get." The show felt like homage to that ambition, and to the liberating openness of jazz. I hope it conveys the essence of why people listen to jazz in the first place.<sup>117</sup>

After decades of effort Coleman had finally brought harmolodics to mainstream consciousness and earned the appreciation of critics and the public alike. Not only had he been honored by the academies of music and the jazz establishment, but now the denizens of popular music were also offering their appreciation.

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<sup>116</sup> John Eyles, "Ornette Coleman's Meltdown Festival is the Best Ever." Allaboutjazz.com. accessed 2/28/2015. <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/ornette-colemans-meltdown-is-the-best-ever-ornette-coleman-by-john-eyles.php>

<sup>117</sup> Eyles, "Meltdown" 2009.

No longer a pariah, Coleman now enjoyed a position as a proven and endearing elder statesman of music. He was awarded an honorary doctorate of music by the University of Michigan in 2010. After a slew of festival appearances throughout the summer, Coleman was invited to share the stage with one of his contemporaries. Sonny Rollins, who had been giving an 80th birthday concert at the Beacon Theatre in New York, introduced a guest performer who was not listed on the program. Coleman then walked on stage and performed “Sonnymoon for Two” with his fellow octogenarian to thunderous applause. Coleman’s performance of the tune was also featured as a track on Rollins’ 2011 album, *Road Shows Vol. 2*.

2010 saw another tribute album, this time by Dave Liebman and concerts in Coleman’s honor in Battery Park, and at the Bowery Poetry Club featuring drummer Calvin Weston. He was given the annual Miles Davis award at the Montreal Jazz Festival for his efforts in “pushing jazz forward,”<sup>118</sup> and clarinetist Joe Rosenberg rereleased a similar tribute record in 2011 featuring Dewey Redman.<sup>119</sup> Atlantic decided to reissue a new edition of *Free Jazz* in that same year, along with *Change of the Century*.

Yet Coleman had still not released a studio album since his work with Geri Allen in 1996. Everything coming out of the record company that bore his name was either a live recording or a reissue of earlier material. One could argue that live records were a better means with which to encapsulate the essence of harmolodics or “sound grammar,” since nothing was rehearsed, the band could then experiment and bring a level of unencumbered creativity to the sound. The core concept of the practice is improvisation on some level. Coleman may have felt that his relationship

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<sup>118</sup> "Spectra News". Nouvelles.equipespectra.ca. accessed 2/28/2015  
[http://nouvelles.equipespectra.ca/blog/?p=732&langswitch\\_lang=en](http://nouvelles.equipespectra.ca/blog/?p=732&langswitch_lang=en)

<sup>119</sup> Redman had passed away in 2006. The Rosenberg album was originally released in 1996.

to the recording studio was one of frustration and dissatisfaction and he would not be the first artist, or even the only saxophonist to reach that conclusion. His compatriot, Sonny Rollins had also abandoned any kind of studio recording (although a few years later than Coleman) preferring to release a series of live performances instead.

Rollins had long considered studio albums to be something of a nuisance, remarking on numerous occasions that the recordings he released were not intended to be the final forms of the pieces. The commercialism of creating albums for public consumption also seemed to disgust him on some level, especially selling his art so that other people (producers, record executives, etc.) could make money. The one value that Rollins saw in releasing new material was its effect as an advertising tool. It was a means by which he could reach a large number of people and encourage them to come to the concert.<sup>120</sup>

Coleman too seemed to resent the idea of being sold as a commodity. His previous resistance to the limitations imposed on him by record labels had led to his unwillingness to work with any of the existing figures in the industry. It was only after hiring his own son as his booking agent, manager and co-director of a privately funded label that he found any comfort in releasing new recordings.

Even so, *Sound Grammar* was recorded from a live concert, and although many recordings of Coleman's domestic and international performances would make it to YouTube and other places on the web, little else was being released officially.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "Orrin Keepnews: Recording Sonny Rollins" YouTube Video, posted by Jazz Video Guy, accessed 1/13/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYmhJq2gJH4>

<sup>121</sup> Coleman never maintained an official, multimedia website but allowed concert goers to share media on the internet without pursuing legal action. Coleman's Facebook presence is merged with Blue Note and is mostly for commercial purposes.

Coleman's 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday party in March of 2013 was held privately, sending rumors swirling about the state of his health. Coleman had usually celebrated in a more spectacular fashion, providing concerts at pubs, recording studios and at his loft on the West Side of Manhattan. Despite the storm of activity of the previous years, 2013 had also not seen a public performance from the saxophonist.

The reasons were likely personal in nature. Jayne Cortez, Coleman's ex-wife and Dendardo's mother, had passed away earlier that year. Denardo had been working with her performance group "The Firespitters" since the early 1990s and she had recorded an album with alumni from Coleman's other past ensembles in 2003, performing with them occasionally up until 2009. Cortez was relatively unknown in musical circles due to her profession as a poet, but it could be argued that she had much acclaim in her own artistic community. She had also been one of Coleman's biggest supporters during his early days in Los Angeles, and one of the only experimental voices in that arts scene. Her death rattled Coleman in spite of their separation and understandably had a major impact on their son's desire to pursue public performances.

Later that year Coleman joined forces with a number of other artists like John Zorn, DJ Logic, and Medeski, Martin, and Wood on a benefit album entitled *The Road to Jajouka*. The concept album was designed to feature several western artists in collaboration with the Master Musicians in order to raise money to keep the Jajouka tradition alive. Even the small village in Morocco began to feel the effects of globalization as the older musicians continued to die, while their younger replacements left the tradition in search of more stable livelihoods. The proceeds were donated to relieve the financial difficulties of the younger artists so that they could remain in Jajouka and continue to learn and perform. Coleman had been attempting to alleviate the financial

burden of the Master Musicians himself for several years now, using his influence to bring them to Europe and the United States for jazz festivals at London, Montreux, and Rotterdam.

By 2014, Coleman had slowed musically and no longer toured, choosing instead to give occasional performances. In June of 2014 the organization, BRIC gave a tribute concert to the 84-year-old saxophonist entitled “Celebrate Ornette” as part of their “Celebrate Brooklyn” series. Coleman performed with 24 other artists and was introduced by his colleague Sonny Rollins. As Coleman took the stage he remarked tearfully: “There’s nothing else but life. We can’t be against each other. We have to help each other. It’ll turn out like you will never forget it.”

In true harmolodic fashion, the event included performers from various genres including, Laurie Anderson, Patti Smith, James Blood Ulmer, The Master Musicians of Jajouka, David Murray, Nels Cline, Geri Allen, Flea, Henry Threadgill, Branford Marsalis, Ravi Coltrane, and tap dancer Savion Glover.

Noticeably absent was one of Coleman’s most celebrated collaborators, Charlie Haden, who had been suffering the effects of post-polio syndrome for the last few years. Haden had by then, also developed liver cancer. The two of them would unfortunately miss another chance to reunite as Haden died in July of 2014. The Liberation Music Orchestra that he founded continues to perform, led by Carla Bley.

Haden was perhaps the perfect collaborator for Coleman as his incredible listening ability often helped him to provide instant accompaniment to any of the saxophonist’s melodies. Coleman once remarked that Haden “plays the music, not the background,” a technique that liberated the bass from its supporting role and made it an equal musical partner, completely aligned with his egalitarian philosophy of performance.

Despite his advancing age, and the passing of past collaborators, Coleman issued an album at the end of 2014. *New Vocabulary* is his first studio album to be released in almost 20 years, and again he pushes into new territory in terms of orchestration. It features trumpeter Jordan McLean (who also incorporates the electronic effects) and drummer Amir Ziv. Both artists had worked with musicians in Coleman's circles in the past, Ziv with John Zorn and Mclean with Patti Smith. Coleman also enlists the skills of pianist Adam Holzman on two tracks.

The record was released electronically, and with little attention, through an artist driven website called System Dialing Records. The album's concept places Coleman in a new sonic territory. The pieces on the record allow Coleman to play the way that he typically plays, but it is clear from the outset that these are not typical Coleman compositions. According to critic Kevin Whitehead the reason for this shift in attitude is that Coleman may have never intended for the album to be released under his name, preferring for it to only bear the name *New Vocabulary*, which is also the name of the group.

This music has a back story. In 2008, Ornette Coleman had met trumpeter Jordan McLean of the Brooklyn Afro funk band Antibalas. They started jamming and they liked it even more when McLean brought along drummer Amir Ziv. Over a period of months, their jams turned into rehearsals as pieces began to take shape out of their improvising. They recorded for three days in 2009, sometimes adding pianist Adam Holzman as a wild card. Then, McLean and Ziv did the editing and mixing.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>“Ornette Coleman Returns with His Unmistakable Sound” NPR.com. Accessed 3/9/2015. <http://www.npr.org/2015/02/20/387772281/ornette-coleman-returns-with-his-unmistakable-sound>

The group is very cohesive, indicating that this project was not a simple, one-time alliance. Rather, the sound points to the development of a new group concept, this time without explicitly naming Coleman as the leader.

In retrospect, this is fitting for Coleman's philosophy of music. He had for a long while attempted to label his groups from the 1980s as simply "Prime Time," but the need to sell his music, market the band and book performances depended largely on his name as a selling point. As long as the name "Ornette Coleman" can evoke feelings of controversy, it also has selling power.

Coleman's true reasons for recording *New Vocabulary* may never be known. He never commented on the record publicly or even in writing. It was never mentioned on his website or Facebook page. However, the intentions of Ziv and McLean were later revealed as the album began to pick up momentum and attract significant attention from listeners and critics. These artists were attempting to use Coleman's name for personal gain as well. Moreover, they had allegedly released the recordings without Coleman's knowledge or permission.

In late May of 2015, Denardo Coleman, who held his father's power of attorney, sued Ziv and McLean for damages/royalties, and violation of federal bootlegging laws.<sup>123</sup> The Coleman's asserted that the sessions which produced *New Vocabulary* "were created during jam sessions between Ornette and a few of his followers with no intent that any recordings of those sessions would ever be released to the public."<sup>124</sup> These sessions, according to Coleman, were intended to

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<sup>123</sup> Anastasia Tsioulcas, "Ornette Coleman Sues over *New Vocabulary*," NPR.com, Accessed 5/29/2015. <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/27/410065414/ornette-coleman-sues-over-new-vocabulary>

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

be for teaching purposes. McLean had initially asked if Coleman would ok them to be released commercially, which he then denied.

Ziv and McLean have denied any wrongdoing, still maintaining that the record was a collaborative effort by all three musicians. As of late September of 2015, *New Vocabulary* remains for sale on System Dialing's website.<sup>125</sup> But one must still question why the record was not released with more fanfare, especially if Ziv and Mclean had Coleman's permission? After all, this was Coleman's first studio recording in nearly 20 years. It should certainly have been big event for everyone involved. One is reminded of Coleman's personal, egalitarian vision of art and his widely known spirit of generosity. Perhaps if Ziv and McLean had released their collaborations with Coleman for free, or even a suggested donation, this may have been avoided.

Since Coleman had been known for decades to be extremely protective of his own worth, and a cynical businessman, it is unlikely that he agreed to a deal that did not favor his interests.

Additionally, Denardo's possession of Coleman's power of attorney was also known widely in New York musical circles, and by the nature of the suit, one can infer that this is not merely about money, but instead about his father's legacy and the control of his music. It is a bit ironic when one remembers that System Dialing Records is intended to be a label run by artists with the best interests of artists in mind.

Sadly, Coleman's last recorded creative effort will be remembered as being enraptured in a legal battle. He died on June 11, 1995 at the age of 85. The official cause of death was listed as cardiac arrest. However, it was known to those close to him that Coleman had been struggling with

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<sup>125</sup> <http://systemdialingrecords.com/market/albums/new-vocabulary/>



diminishing health for the past few years.<sup>126</sup> In a way it is somewhat fitting. Coleman began his career amid controversy. It seems that he ended it in the same fashion.

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<sup>126</sup> Ben Ratliff, "Ornette Coleman, Saxophonist Who Rewrote the Language of Jazz, Dies at 85" *New York Times*. June 11, 2015.

## 4.0 HARMOLODICS

The term “harmolodic” was coined by Ornette Coleman for the liner notes for the recording of *Skies of America* in 1972. It was described as a synthesis of the concepts of harmony, melody, and movement. Coleman stated that the ideas underlying the method were derived from a theory book that he had originally intended to publish in the mid-1970s, but had been more or less codified in his mind since his arrival in New York.<sup>127</sup> The language on *Skies* is brief and vague when describing the methodology however. “The orchestration of the work stems from the *The Harmolodic Theory*, which uses melody, harmony and the instrumentation of movement of forms... The writing is applied to harmolodic modulation, meaning to modulate in range without changing keys.”<sup>128</sup> Is Coleman being deliberately cryptic? How does one modulate without changing keys? And what is meant by the “instrumentation of movement of forms?” For that matter, what does Coleman consider to be “form” in this case?

These few sentences have intrigued several scholars and music critics who have attempted to bring to light what “harmolodic” actually means. In interviews, Coleman’s sidemen have been documented as having varying opinions on the meaning of the theory as well. This is likely because of Coleman’s obvious vagueness in combination with the amounts of time between their individual tenures within the group. Each of these artists had received a variation of the harmolodic theory due to their association with it at different points of refinement. For instance, some of Coleman’s

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<sup>127</sup> J.B. Figi, “Ornette”

<sup>128</sup> Coleman and Hentoff, Notes to *Skies of America*.

earliest collaborators, Don Cherry and Charlie Haden, had each defined the concept in a similar, although not perfectly congruent fashion. Cherry said the theory was...

...a profound system of developing your ear along with your technical proficiency on your instrument... We have to know the chord structure perfectly, all the possible intervals, and then play around with it... If I play a C and have it in my mind as the tonic, that's what it will become. If I want it to be a minor third or a major seventh that has the tendency to resolve upward, then the quality of the note will change.<sup>129</sup>

Haden's depiction of the theory was less detailed. He asserted, "technically speaking, it was a constant modulation in the improvising that was taken from the direction of the composition, and from the direction inside the musician, and from listening to each other."<sup>130</sup>

Both musicians seem to be hinting at something significant in the idea that listening plays a large part in defining the harmolodic concept. However Haden is the one who references the composition's role in determining the nature of the improvisation to follow. This would certainly explain how Coleman's early groups were able to create such remarkable cohesiveness despite the lack of any notated harmony.

The issue becomes more complicated when one references the musicians from Prime Time. Bern Nix, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and James "Blood" Ulmer all seemed to have a different take on the methodology and defined it in vastly different terms. Ulmer, who was the first of Coleman's electric musicians, believes that there is a unique harmonic component to the theory. He describes the idea of a "harmolodic chord" as "...a harmolodic chord is a chord that cannot be inverted. Out

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<sup>129</sup> Conrad Silvert, "Old and New Dreams," *Down Beat*, June 1980.

<sup>130</sup> Dan Morgenstern, "Charlie Haden: From Hillbilly to Avant-Garde, A Rocky Road," *Down Beat*, March 1967.

of all the chords, there are only five that cannot be inverted, from which you can get major, minor, augmented, and diminished sounds.”<sup>131</sup> Ulmer does not elaborate on what these chords are, nor does he give a specific example. In western music, the idea of a major or minor chord that cannot be inverted seems to be a paradox, simply because of the different, component intervals—a major (or minor) triad will have a different harmonic character if the third or fifth is placed in the bass. The only chords that fit Ulmer’s description are augmented chords or fully diminished seventh chords, constructed with identical intervals, each of which, when inverted, will result in another chord of the same quality in root position. This leaves us with four “chord families” for augmented chords and three for diminished chords. (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Families of Augmented triads (top) and Diminished 7 chords (bottom).**

Ulmer also delves into the philosophical side of harmolodics. He gives this example:

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<sup>74</sup>Francis Davis, “Harmolodics Redux: James Blood Ulmer’s Greatest Moment Recaptured from Sludge Blues,” *The Village Voice*, January 2006

When you create the idea, and then flow your art from your idea, then you are thinking harmolodically. You can say it's your art because you created the feel that you took the art from. Here's a good example of creating art harmolodically: I went to France, and this artist took us way out in the country where he had created this scene that he painted. He made the hills and the valleys, he planted flowers on the water, and he put the pond there in the first place. He created that landscape so he could paint it—which is what separates the concept of harmolodics from other concepts...A harmolodic player is different, but there are rules to playing harmolodically. I learned the rules from Ornette Coleman, and the rules are separate from the Western concept of playing. Scales and chords are eliminated in terms of the Western concept of what you use them for, and you don't use chords and scales in linear situations. All of your rhythm works off a concept that is superimposed on the linear concept. Everything goes in a circle. Nothing is linear. That's the harmolodic concept musically.<sup>132</sup>

The statement is intriguing, especially when one considers the philosophical implications of Ornette Coleman's restructuring of the jazz language. Coleman is like the artist in Ulmer's anecdote, and his compositions are analogous to the conception of the painting. Even though the artist uses recognizable forms in his landscape, the overall subject of the painting is of his own design rather than the imitation of an already existing formation.

Similarly, Coleman's work uses some existing jazz vocabulary, but he has completely reorganized it to form a soundscape of his own creation, shaped and informed by his individual, eccentric understanding. He then bases his improvisation on the melody of the composition rather than relying on typical, chord-based formulas, thus creating a second level of distance from the bebop architecture though at the same time still soundly within the spirit of the Afro-American musical tradition.

Coleman's forays into his own version of free jazz were concordant with the philosophy of Afro-American liberation and cultural identity in the 1960s. He was one of many voices struggling

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<sup>132</sup> Davis, "Harmolodic"

to understand and shape what it meant to be both Black and American, and to recognize that struggle through art that depicted a unique cultural space. Coleman's work was one of many new attempts at creating the "Black aesthetic," minimizing the European sound of jazz in favor of elevating its African roots. Harmolodics was an attempt to codify his version of that aesthetic from within a larger musical community.

Ulmer's explanation would also seem to support Coleman's own thoughts on harmolodics. "[H]armolodics can be used in almost any kind of expression. You can think harmolodically. You can write fiction and poetry in harmolodic. Harmolodics allows a person to use a multiplicity of elements to express more than one direction. The greatest freedom in harmolodics is human instinct."<sup>133</sup> Perhaps harmolodics is not a compositional method or theory but instead a philosophy, or a formula for creating art.

But this idea is contradicted in part by Bern Nix, who took Ulmer's place in Prime Time later in the 1970s.

I [once] said to Ornette that it seemed like counterpoint. I was working with him, rehearsing with him, and we were getting down to a couple of different lines...and I said to him, 'You know, to me this sounds like counterpoint.' He said, 'Well, it's not exactly counterpoint, it's something else.' You know what I mean? The way Ornette uses language; he likes to put his own spin on everything. But to me, it's contrapuntal.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ornette Coleman, Paul Buhle ed. "Something to Think About," *Free Spirits: Annals of The Insurgent Imagination*, San Francisco, City Lights, 1982.

<sup>134</sup> Simon Jay Harper, "Bern Nix: A History of Harmolodics," August, 2009  
<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=33841>

In the anecdote we can see Coleman's resistance to restatement or simplification of the theory. With this description one could argue that concept of harmolodics may have some elements of contrapuntal technique, especially when thinking about the multiple layers of melody and harmonic direction occurring simultaneously within Prime Time. But the concept cannot be that simple. What about Coleman's other groups where the melodic instruments play a unison line? Most other forms of jazz also have at least a basic sense of counterpoint between rhythm sections and the rest of the band.

In 1983, Coleman told *Downbeat* magazine that harmolodics was

“essentially the use of the physical and the mental of one's own logic made into an expression of sound to bring about the musical sensation of unison executed by a single person or with a group. Applied to the particulars of music, this means that harmony, melody, speed, rhythm, time and phrases all have equal position in the results that come from the placing and spacing of ideas.”<sup>135</sup>

The statement is highly problematic as even the term “unison” is not a standardized practice in harmolodics. Typical musicians would define this term to mean the interval of a unison, the same pitch played at the same time (rhythmic unisons are a known compositional device but are generally qualified as such). But the Coleman definition is much more in line with the Webster's definition, meaning simply to “sound at once” or a “concord.” In the description above, Coleman seems to conflate the term “unison” in the musical sense, with the broader idea of “unity,” meaning to play the music together.

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<sup>135</sup> Ornette Coleman, “Prime Time for Harmolodics.” *Down Beat*, July 1983, pp. 54-55.

It would seem that Coleman's theory is characterized by such variations from standard practice. Earlier scholars have pointed these out as errors stemming from his musical self-education. For instance, when Coleman initially learned that the alto saxophone was pitched in a minor third away from the concert key, he began to believe that C on the saxophone was A concert instead of E<sup>b</sup>. This was primarily because the musical alphabet is written ABCDEFG.<sup>136</sup>

Another common practice was that of harmolodic transposition, a technique used frequently in the early 1970s. Coleman writes one melodic line, which is then read by both transposing and non-transposing instruments resulting in parallel 4ths for Bb and Eb instruments and an additional whole step for non-transposed instruments. (See Figure 2). Wilson defines this idea as harmolodic parallel motion. This technique is used on *Skies of America* and employed frequently on *Science Fiction*, most noticeably on the vocal pieces featuring Asha Puthli.



Figure 2: A C major scale read by C, Eb and Bb instruments. (Eb line written 8va)

While these kinds of misunderstandings may have been the beginning of the harmolodic theory; the method has grown to incorporate several other unique concepts. Coleman's characteristic vagueness in giving performance direction to his musicians seems to lie at the core of why no one can seem to nail down exactly what harmolodics is. There are however several

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<sup>136</sup> Litwieler, *A Harmolodic Life*.



principles that would seem to be present in all phases of Coleman's artistic development. This could lead one to believe that Coleman's harmolodic theory isn't really a theory in the strict sense of the word, but a loosely defined group of core techniques and elements that Coleman uses to create his art. Wilson defines some of these terms but frequently lacks the theoretical detail necessary to really pin down the key concepts. Additionally, Coleman's techniques all have a common goal: to identify and encourage the predominant strengths of his current ensemble. Wilson also does not highlight that most, if not all, of these techniques can be melodically driven.

Evidence that Coleman's misunderstandings of the bebop vocabulary informed his compositional choices is well established. However, it is also clearly suggested by his recordings that this was, at least in part, a willful avoidance of convention. A piece like "The Blessing" (1958) for instance, uses the typical AABA form and has standard eight bar sections and a modulating bridge. This indicates that Coleman could in fact write music according to the popular and socially acceptable models of his time period. The fact that he chose to follow his own unique interpretations rather than force himself to conform to common practice is what has defined him as an artist.

The first common element in all of Coleman's music (as defined by Wilson) is the idea of metrical liberation; no single meter prevails through an entire piece. Examples of this can be found early on in some of the first Coleman recordings. The perceived meter is driven by a series of irregularly shaped melodic phrases. Nearly all Coleman pieces utilize this approach to keeping time. Figure 4 shows a segment of "Lonely Woman" (1959) with the implied meter marked as conforming to the band's treatment of the melody.

A second tenet of Coleman's musical practice is polymodality, a term that Wilson defines as the ability of the ensemble to change the implied key or mode of a piece of music based on the

lines created by the lead improviser.<sup>137</sup> However, it can also refer to the ability of the group to improvise in the absence of any prevailing key area, using several tonal centers at once. Again the concept has a discernable tie to the melodic line except in situations where the collective improvisation has no clear leader, e.g. “Free Jazz” (1960) or “Science Fiction” (1971).

Thirdly, Wilson describes the sudden tempo changes present in Coleman’s compositions. These are most frequent in Coleman’s trio period of the late 1960s. Abrupt tempo changes are also used in improvisational sections to distinguish between lead performers or to transition from a slow moving thematic statement to a high energy improvisatory atmosphere. Several of Coleman’s recordings, e.g. “Law Years” (1971) and “Zig Zag,” (1968) use a slower, legato treatment of the melody on introduction and then quickly change tempo to suit the direction of the current leader upon entering an improvisatory section.

It is important to mention that Coleman’s work with Prime Time does not make use of this technique as often as that of his previous ensembles. This also holds true for the idea of metric irregularity previously described. In attempting to bring his work in greater alignment with popular music standards, Coleman may have thought to use a more consistent, danceable approach to time in order to again connect with his audiences. Prime Time’s distinct instrumentation also limits the “parallel harmolodic motion” described above, as Coleman seldom uses any other transposing instruments or plays melodies in unison with any other member of the ensemble. Thus, Wilson’s theoretical guidelines for investigation are excellent for describing Coleman’s earlier work, but they are not a definitive compendium of all forms of the harmolodic method.

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<sup>137</sup> All musicians in Coleman’s ensembles are improvising almost constantly, therefore the idea of “soloist” as seen in most small group jazz recordings would be inaccurate. The term “lead improviser” is used as a substitute.

However, Wilson does mention one harmolodic concept that is evocative of nearly all later Coleman works, an orchestral idea of sound. Coleman's desire to work with larger ensembles was long standing. From 1970 to 1973, his recording groups grew in size. It was only when Columbia pulled the plug after the recording of *Skies of America* that he decided to downsize again. And even after adopting an electric sound, his concept was still largely symphonically minded. "What I'm searching for is greater expressiveness. I don't affiliate myself with either the rock movement or with electric music, I only want to create a better starting point in order to know more and more, to go further in the direction of a big orchestra."<sup>138</sup>

In fact, the loss of this orchestra may have been Coleman's reason for adopting electric instruments in the first place. Amplification allows for wider dynamic possibilities with fewer employed musicians, not to mention the incredible range of sounds and timbres available through modification and electronic effects. Prime Time may have been Coleman's longest lasting ensemble because through it he could explore a wider array of possibilities than with any other small group from his career. Not only could these musicians perform his contrapuntal, improvised visions, but they were also open to exploring harmolodic concepts and using extended techniques. Furthermore, each of them was already well versed in the knowledge of creative Afro-American expression and had experience in the manipulation of western classical music.

It is this individualist, Afro-American approach to music that gave birth to harmolodics. Suffice it to say that regardless of how one defines the term, the creative reconstruction starts and ends with Ornette Coleman. But the unique perspective that helped Coleman to gain his audience

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<sup>138</sup> Endress, 12

in the first place became a hindrance later in his career. While he never actually fully accepted the moniker of “jazz musician,” Coleman was still viewed as a Black saxophonist from Texas; his attempts at composing in a Western classical style were seen as an infiltration. He reflected on these attitudes.

Once I heard Eubie Blake say that when he was playing in black bands for white audiences, during the time when segregation was strong, that the musicians had to go on stage without any written music. The musicians would go backstage, look at the music, then leave the music there and go out and play it. He was saying that they had a more saleable appeal if they pretended not to know what they were doing. The white audience felt safer. If they had the music in front of them, the audience would think that they were trying to be white. So that’s what I think about the word improvising. It’s outdated. The term doesn’t describe the musician’s individual struggle for expression.<sup>139</sup>

Coleman’s lack of acceptance by this community was not unheard of. Black artists like Duke Ellington, who was also regarded as something of a primitive based on his compositional techniques, encountered similar resistance when trying to get works premiered by classical artists and in classical venues, despite having a more positive public image.<sup>140</sup> However, because of the amount of success both Ellington and Coleman had achieved in a jazz environment and because these musicians were not versed in the Western European tradition, they were always viewed as outsiders; their Blackness branded them as “other.”

Coleman’s work, and that of his contemporaries, had attempted to divorce itself from these systems that had governed earlier forms of the music. In doing so, it no longer fit the mold of a “jazz” since these new sounds and conventions were not inherited from the canon of previous

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<sup>139</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 85.

<sup>140</sup> Journalists and critics often compared Ellington to composers of the great European canon.

artists. These factors increased Coleman's isolation from the more traditionally minded, while innovators like Mingus and Dolphy, who had previously demonstrated a level of command over previous styles, and whose musical ideas were not as radical, were more readily understood and tolerated.

Neither did he fit the category of an avant-garde, classical composer. Boulez, Babbitt, Stockhausen and others had all previously defied compositional conventions in their artistic realm as well, but because they were white and not autodidacts, their creative explorations were tolerated, at least by a number of academics and other composers. (They, like Coleman, were eventually accepted and canonized). But Coleman had no such privilege, at least not initially, and could not carry the same weight in compositional circles. His musical development was not only a product of an Afro-centric approach to music, but a unique understanding and incredible, individual effort in and persistence, and despite his success as a jazz artist, he could not seem to convince orchestral musicians to take him seriously. "Harmolodics," as a theory, may have started as an effort to be heard and respected by the compositional community. It may have been a bold, experimental bluff of sorts, describing a theory textbook in order to increase the intrigue in his music and capture the attention of theorists, and other composers. Many jazz musicians have long suggested this, and this idea of Coleman as a kind of musical charlatan is well known among artists. However, despite the rumors, Coleman *does* have a unique approach to music.

Nowhere is this individual effort more apparent than in Coleman's improvisation. If harmolodics is in fact, as Coleman says, "the way I play" arranged for various ensembles, a musical analysis may not be sufficient to construct a full understanding of the theory. Despite the variety of groups that he recorded with, Coleman's performances are remarkably similar in how they are constructed. Ekkhard Jost was perhaps the first to notice that these recorded improvisations are

derived from the melody of the composition itself with rhythmic and harmonic variations but not necessarily based on any consistent harmonic direction. Bebop vocabulary is not entirely absent, but it has been modified, sometimes beyond the point of recognition.

In the past Coleman's new artistic directions have been explained as stemming from his technical shortcomings on the instrument, just as his compositional choices were explained by his lack of knowledge or theoretical misinterpretations. The allegation is that Ornette has little or no skill whatsoever in playing the instrument with regard to proper fingering technique or embouchure position. Another set of criticisms point to the fact that Coleman's compositions, though often performed at very fast tempos, do not have the harmonic complexity of the pieces performed by say, Charlie Parker. Thus, Ornette had never been forced to demonstrate his technical skills in any real capacity. He has not undertaken the traditional apprenticeship styled path of being "tested" in jam sessions or in a big band and therefore his skills were unproven.

But other earlier innovators had also suffered the same kinds of derision and dismissal by the generations that preceded them. Is Ornette Coleman's refusal to play bebop really that much different than Dizzy Gillespie's boredom with Swing leading to his dismissal from the Cab Calloway Band? One might argue yes, since more skill might be required to play bebop than the big band music of the 1930s, at least in terms of virtuosic improvisation. But surely free jazz also requires a high level of musical ability to perform effectively.

Older improvisers would likely debate this point however, as their perception of freely improvised music was that the structure had no rules or organization and was nothing more than loosely controlled chaos. But they were products of a different cultural space than free musicians, and had already created a value system that served a separate purpose and maintained an entirely independent musical identity. Virtuosity was paramount as the high level of instrumental mastery

was a means for their art to be taken seriously. Free musicians benefitted and drew from this system of aesthetics but simply did not emulate the stylistic traits of their predecessors. They evolved the political beliefs and the concepts of an Afro-American art form into a musical movement that attempted to completely reject the concepts that artists need to conform to the expectations of white audiences. But unlike the beboppers, free jazz longer held the same musical criteria as the only measure of value. In fact, some may have even felt that such technical virtuosity in the traditional sense, was a European standard of value.

Comparisons may again be drawn between the two generational shifts. Thelonious Monk's description of Coleman's sound as "shocking and unexpected"<sup>141</sup> is similar to how Louis Armstrong had famously referred to bebop as "Chinese music"<sup>142</sup> in the decades before. In short, each successive generation of musicians pushed the music in a different direction of artistic experimentation and the previous innovators found it difficult to understand the new language.

From all of these fragments one can begin to piece together a working, portrait of the harmolodic theory. Simply put, the harmolodic theory isn't really a codified theory at all, but more of a collection of basic musical principles borrowed from Coleman's improvisational technique and then applied to composition, arrangement, and orchestration. Coleman then taught these ideas to his sidemen, but because of his characteristic (or possibly intentional) vagueness each musician took the information and combined it with his or her own personal approach to creating free improvisation. This is likely why none of these sidemen can agree on a single definition of the theory.

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<sup>141</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 67.

<sup>142</sup> Joachim Berendt, *The Jazz Book, The Jazz Book*. Westport Connecticut: Lawrence Hill, 1981

The following harmolodic principles on page 96 are a continuation of what Peter Niklas Wilson attempted to create in his text on Coleman's life and music in 1997. Some of these principles are new; others are refined versions of his initial attempts at defining such characteristics. Furthermore, it is important to remember that not all Coleman compositions display all characteristics of the theory; some exhibit several, while others may include only one.

#### **4.1.1 Harmolodic Principle A: Metric Fluidity**

Harmolodic Principle A is one of the most common characteristics of Coleman's compositions and improvisations.<sup>143</sup> While Jost and others discuss the ability of various Coleman ensembles to perform without the constriction of a pre-established meter, their overall description tends to omit that the melodies of Coleman's pieces are what establish the metric feel. Wilson does include a brief description of this characteristic in his section on the construction of Coleman themes, dividing the taxonomy into categories of "true" Coleman themes and melodies influenced by bebop patterns.<sup>144</sup> Yet he does not acknowledge that both of these categories often exhibit the concept of creating meter from the melodic structure. Coleman was much less concerned with metric regularity than other composers and this lack of regard for regular phrasing has always allowed him to make interesting choices when constructing melodic units.

Coleman's use of this technique is perhaps his trademark in terms of style and his conception of it is likely to have begun even before the first recorded examples of his work in the

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<sup>143</sup> Wilson refers to this idea as "Metric Liberation."

<sup>144</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 77.



late 1950s. Compositions like “Chronology” (1959) and “Bird Food” (1960) are clear examples of bebop style melodies using this type of structure. The melody of “Bird Food” is transcribed in Figure 3.

Notice how the shape of the melodic line implies and dictates the meter. While holding the beat steady, the band plays one bar of 2/4 to lead into the repeated section. The overall form is 9.5 bars in length.<sup>145</sup> The band does not bother to finish a complete 4/4 measure that would allow space to create a harmonic turnaround (as would be standard practice in bebop). This would typically cause displacement of the beats when the melody is played on the second time through the form from the perspective of the listener. However, the ensemble adapts to the structure of the composition and the abbreviated bar is played smoothly into the beginning of the melodic line.

The structure of themes like these is one explanation for Coleman’s frequent dismissal by other jazz musicians when he was first establishing himself in Los Angeles. If the melody is not played in the same rhythmic space, then any harmony composed to be played alongside it would sound wrong if the abbreviated bar is not readily anticipated by the chord playing instrumentalist. To many practiced bebop artists, it would seem like Coleman was rushing into the restatement of the theme. This unintended consequence may have been one reason for Coleman’s decision to abandon his use of harmony playing instruments for over a decade. The first industry led recordings of Coleman, with Shelly Manne and Percy Heath, are certainly evidence that other musicians were taken off guard by the structure of his pieces at least as much as by his

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<sup>145</sup> Even if the bar was completed with a typical “turnaround” device, odd phrase lengths were generally uncommon practice in jazz up until the early 1960s. Most bebop musicians favored phrase lengths that were multiples of 2, 4 or 8 rather than 5, 7 or as in this case 10. Exceptions can be found in works by Horace Silver, Charles Mingus, Dave Brubeck and Eric Dolphy. The Miles Davis Quintet began to employ these forms as well after the addition of Wayne Shorter in 1964.

improvisatory style. This example also shows that musicians could not simply play anything they wanted in Coleman's groups.



**Figure 3: The bebop derived theme of “Bird Food” (1960) transcribed from *Change of the Century*.**

These metric variations are not limited to bebop derived compositional structures. One of the most frequently cited examples of the Coleman theme, “Lonely Woman” (1959) makes clear use of metric variation in several sections, frequently shifting from 4/4 to 3/4, or 5/4, or 6/4. The first repetition of the A theme from “Lonley Woman” transcribed in Figure 4 depicts these additions and subtractions to suit the phraseology.

The musical score for "Lonely Woman" (1959) is presented in four systems, each featuring an Alto Saxophone (A. SAX.) and a Contralto (CNT.) part. The score is written in treble clef and includes key signature changes and time signature changes between systems.

- System 1:** Key signature: B-flat major (two flats). Time signature: 4/4. The A. SAX. part begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note. The CNT. part begins with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note.
- System 2:** Key signature: D-flat major (three flats). Time signature: 6/4. The A. SAX. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, a quarter note, and a half note. The CNT. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, a quarter note, and a half note.
- System 3:** Key signature: E-flat major (three flats). Time signature: 3/4. The A. SAX. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and a quarter note. The CNT. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and a quarter note.
- System 4:** Key signature: F major (one flat). Time signature: 4/4. The A. SAX. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and a quarter note. The CNT. part begins with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and a quarter note.

Figure 4: The opening statement of “Lonely Woman” (1959)

As clearly depicted, the meter of the piece changes based on the wind instruments stress of the melodic line. Both of these examples from Coleman's early period are concrete evidence of metric fluidity. The theme from "School Work" (1971) (See Figure 5) also shows a distinct metric modulation dictated by how Coleman plays the rhythmic phrase in the B section of the piece. The pattern can be counted in 4/4 but the band follows Coleman's stylistic cues resulting in a slightly disjointed 8/8 (3+3+2) metric feel because of the emphasis placed on the pickup notes on the "and" of beat four, and the decrease in tempo.



Figure 5: School Work (1971)

Even more interestingly, there are other clear examples of metric ambiguity in Coleman's recordings that even Coleman alumni are unable to reproduce with the same sense of fluidity. A piece from the *Science Fiction* recording sessions "Happy House" (later released on *Broken Shadows*) is played with a great deal of liberty in the metric phrasing. The Old and New Dreams group attempted to recreate this piece (and additionally "Law Years" and "Street Woman") but without Coleman in the band, the recordings seem to lack the characteristic uncertainty in the phrasing.

Wilson also draws attention to the creation of Coleman themes based upon a structure of “endless riffs,” or pieces based on a simple melodic fragment that repeats several times in an arbitrary number until it is interrupted by some other melodic material.

Coleman’s “Theme from a Symphony” from 1973 is probably the best known example of this technique. The piece was originally conceived as the A and B section of “School Work” (1971) and then scored for orchestra as a movement called “The Good Life” from *Skies of America*. It later appeared as “Theme from a Symphony” on the record *Dancing in Your Head* (1973) and has since been called “Dancing in Your Head” during live performances after 1977, when the album was released.

The first recorded version of the piece is arguably the most consistent with conventional practice. Coleman repeats the A melodic line several times before moving to performing the B material, playing it once and then leaving a pause for the rest of the band to come in on the pickup to the A material once again.

However, live recordings show that Coleman’s performances of this piece display a great deal of variation. The theme often returns arbitrarily, and not always with the same starting offbeat (i.e. with the “and” of 2 instead of the “and” of 4) or sometimes even beginning on a downbeat, creating a general feeling uncertainty for the listener.

Prime Time’s response to the return of the melodic material is to adapt immediately to what Coleman is doing, creating an even more jarring effect than the addition or removal of beats from the meter like in “Bird Food” or “Lonely Woman.” This seems to be the rule for these riff based compositions. Coleman repeats the overall theme as many times as he likes, sometimes embellishing or fragmenting the overall form. The rest of the band then improvises around Coleman’s statements and adapts to each recapitulation, creating an overall sense of moving in

and out of a previously established tempo and meter. Such works could be considered a logical outgrowth of previously conceived melody-centered experiments from previous decades.

#### **4.1.2 Harmolodic Principle B: Irregular, Non Pre-composed Harmony**

The harmony of Coleman's compositions is also driven by ensemble interactions. The most obvious example would be Wilson's description of "Harmolodic Parallel Motion," where a score is read by differently transposing instruments simultaneously creating a distinctive harmonic effect.<sup>146</sup> But this is only one harmonic device and can only be employed in pieces where there are two or more instrumentalists performing the melodic phrase. Other harmonic directions are suggested through the motion of the bass line. This is especially noticeable when Charlie Haden performs with Coleman's ensembles as he frequently creates bass lines without any predetermined chord changes, and relies solely on the motion of the melodic phrases as played by the wind instruments. He discussed his first time playing with Coleman as one of the formative musical experiences of his career.

There was music all over the rug and chairs and bed and everywhere. I got my bass out, and he picked up one of the manuscripts off the rug and said, 'Lets play this.' I said, 'Sure,' but I was scared to death. He said, 'Now I got some chord changes written below the melody here that I heard when I was writing the melody. You can play those changes when you play the song, but when I start to improvise, make up your own changes from what I'm playing.' I said, 'With pleasure.' Man, we played all day and all night. And the next day we stopped to get a hamburger and we came back and we played some more.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Example on page 56.

<sup>147</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 44-45.

By the 1970s, Haden had mastered this technique so well, that the pieces from *Science Fiction* sound almost like they have a composed harmonic direction. One of the Asha Puthli ballads, “All My Life,” clearly illustrates this concept as well as the notion of “harmolodic parallel motion.” The changes in every stanza remain relatively static with minor variations to imply different harmonies in order to better illustrate the lyric content of each verse. A sample of the harmonic content is shown in Figure 7. Longs and shorts are notated approximately in the sample pictured.<sup>148</sup> Parallel fourths in the instrumental strophe (Figure 7) are likely achieved by alto and tenor sax or trumpet reading from the same part in different sections of the piece. Charlie Haden implies the chord changes written above the staff through his bass motion.

Haden’s bass lines create interesting qualities. Typically, a number of these implied changes would be written as more standard progressions of ii-V-I in major or ii<sup>♭</sup>-V<sup>alt</sup>-i in minor. But instead the listener is presented with several twisted versions of these conventional practices. Shifts between major and minor modes are clearly depicted with D<sup>-7(b5)</sup> to G<sup>7alt</sup> moving to C major, certainly a choice that is reminiscent of a ballad from another world.

Additionally, the bass lines make frequent use of leading tones which often results in more consonant combinations with the vocals than with the other instruments. In this example Haden’s improvised line creates a noticeably “straight-ahead” accompaniment in the introductory strophe which is then immediately warped by the addition of the harmolodic parallel motion when the wind instruments enter. The resulting effects on the record again take an approach that is partially informed by the jazz tradition, but also an expansion and reinterpretation of the basic rules and the previously established language. Although Haden does not move far from his original note choices

outlined in the introductory strophes, his pedal tones, often on the dominant of the perceived chord at the entrance of the horn section causes the overall harmony to be distorted.

The image displays a musical score for the introductory strophe of the song "All My Life". It consists of three systems of music, each featuring a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

**System 1 (Measures 1-7):** The system begins with a boxed letter 'A' above the first measure. The vocal line has two parts: "1. I'VE WAIT-ED ALL MY LIFE FOR YOU AND NOW YOU'RE HERE" and "2. MY HEART AND I AGREE TO WAIT FOR YOU. I'M GLAD." The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, including a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

**System 2 (Measures 8-12):** The system starts with a measure rest of 8 measures. The vocal line continues with "YOU NE-VER KNEW ME THOUGH IT SEEMS SO LONG A GO" and "I KNEW YOU LONG A GO YOUR NAME HAS BEEN MY JOY, THAT I NE-VER KNEW. TIME NE-VER WILL EX". The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

**System 3 (Measures 13-17):** The system starts with a measure rest of 13 measures. The vocal line continues with "LOVE AL-WAYS AND NOW I'M YOURS" and "IST FOR ME AND YOU A-GAIN". The piano accompaniment continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, ending with a double bar line.

Figure 6: The introductory strophe from “All My Life” with Charlie Haden’s improvised bass accompaniment.



The musical score is for the instrumental strophe of "All My Life". It is written for three instruments: Alto Saxophone, Trumpet, and Tenor Saxophone. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains the first nine measures, and the second system contains the next nine measures. Above the staves, implied chord changes are indicated. The first system's chords are: C, F, E-7, A-7, D-7(b5), G7alt, C, A-7, D7. The second system's chords are: B-7, E-7, F7, F#dim, Gsus4, G, B-7, E-7, A-7/D, D7. The music is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, and a bass line with eighth and quarter notes.

Figure 7: The instrumental strophe from “All My Life” with Haden’s implied chord changes.

Variation in the bass line suggests that Haden’s work was more by ear than from a composed set of chords created by the composer as in earlier Coleman works, or the ones described by Haden in the previous anecdote on page 102. Further examples of this can be heard on *Science Fiction* on pieces like “Law Years,” where the harmonic motion also shifts between major and minor modes of C, and the other Puthli ballad, “What Reason Could I Give?”

Melodically driven harmony is also especially prevalent in Coleman’s later works with Haden on *Soapsuds*, *Soapsuds*. One important example of this is the television theme “Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman” as it represents a harmolodic interpretation of an originally quite concise and commonplace piece. Just in the short introduction one can see both the metric and harmonic pillars of the harmolodic theory unfolding. By having Haden play the opening section

unaccompanied, Ornette may have decided that the melody of the tune was intended to be a reference point for the listener, and therefore important enough to be played without and other musical elements being present. When Haden returns to the melody at the end of the experimentation, it is revealed that the two improvisers have pushed far from the original harmonic constraints of the original parameters.

Like in his earlier music, the melodic statements determine the harmony of this particular piece through the interactions of the individual performers. When Coleman and Haden play lines together, the resulting harmonies are completely improvised and the theme is reinvented with every repetition bringing a new harmonic interpretation.

#### **4.1.3 Harmolodic Principle C: Elimination of the Soloist/Rhythm Section Paradigm and Removal of Instrumental/Vocal Hierarchy**

As Coleman and his followers have mentioned several times in multiple interviews, harmolodics is a collaborative process. Its distinctive nature stems from the ability of the ensemble to listen to one another and create art instinctively. Coleman's irritation with Prime Time being labeled as his "backup band" is clear in his interview with Howard Mandel.

Every time I read a review of my record, it says that I'm the only one soloing. That's incredible, because that's all Prime Time is doing. I'm the one that's stuck—*they're* the ones that are free... I mean, when you hear my band, you know that everybody is soloing, harmolodically. Here I am with a band based upon everybody creating an instant melody, composition, from what people used to call improvising, and no one has been able to figure

out that that's what's going on. All my disappointment about it just makes me realize how advanced the music really is.<sup>149</sup>

It seems that listeners frequently misinterpret what Prime Time is actually doing onstage or on their recordings. This is likely to do with the background of most audiences that were listening to jazz when the group was first emerging and making records. When listened to with bebop, or neo-bop oriented ears, the music seems to contain large sections of time keeping and Coleman's saxophone interjections are taken to be the main idea of the pieces. However, ensemble interaction is really the area in which Prime Time shines as a functioning musical organism.

Like many of Coleman's later idiosyncrasies, Prime Time's sound has its origins in Jajouka. The orchestration, arrangement and improvisational abilities of the Sufi musicians had a profound effect on Coleman's understanding of what an improvising ensemble could be and he endeavored to recreate a version of that musical world in his own style. In many ways, the sounds achieved in that small Moroccan village were a realization of his dreams of a great improvising orchestra. However, by the time Coleman had fully absorbed the magnitude of this experience, he no longer had access to the same financial backing that enabled *Skies of America* to come to fruition and substitute instrumentation needed to be sought.

This vision becomes clear when one considers the structure of most of Prime Time's performances as "riff" based compositions. While Coleman had repeatedly stated in the past that his main focus was on composing, this shift to a simpler style of writing indicates a shift to favoring a group interaction as the main goal of the music, e.g. the main motive of "Theme from a

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<sup>149</sup> Howard Mandel, *Miles, Ornette, Cecil: Jazz Beyond Jazz*, New York: Routledge, 2008. 17.

Symphony.” (See Figure 8) This is the only composed material for a piece that lasts nearly 15 minutes on the original recording. Instead of relying on a longer form, the piece has been stripped down to the bare basics of the musical idea. Coleman and Prime Time then distort and transform the simple passage to create entirely new melodic, harmonic and rhythmic material every time the piece is performed.



**Figure 8: Theme from a Symphony” (1973)**

In doing this, Prime Time is subverting another bebop paradigm. While previous Coleman groups do use some aspect of the bebop formula in ordering the solo sections, the artists in Prime Time are essentially always soloing with and around each other. Coleman is the only one who really plays the thematic material at all in the opening sections, enabling the group to create fresh musical statements on the spot in reaction to his interpretation and reinterpretation of the melody. The rhythm section instruments are liberated from their usual role as backing harmonic devices for the soloist and makes them equal participants in the creation of the music.

While Prime Time’s work is a more finalized, and perhaps the best interpretation of this concept, Coleman had been toying with the instrumental hierarchy for decades beginning with recordings like *Free Jazz*. Most of his trio recordings enable the bass to play melodically and allow the drums to move away from time keeping to fill improvisational sections with coloristic, or sometimes ambient percussion.

Later records like *Science Fiction* do the same, even positioning the voice and wind instruments together in the mix indicating that the singer is not a special addition that needed to be placed “out front,” of the ensemble as in earlier forms of jazz. This subversion of a single soloist mentality is one of the most important characteristics of the harmolodic method. All artists taking part in the music should be considered to be equal participants. Even Coleman does not consider himself to be above the rest of the band.

#### **4.1.4 Harmolodic Principle D: Fluidic and Variable Tempi**

One of the most notable characteristics of the early Coleman ensembles from the late 1950s was their ability to play at extremely fast tempos. It was one of the most interesting characteristics of the music according to the critics that first reviewed Coleman’s concerts and recordings.<sup>150</sup> Later versions of these quartets featured the same stunning effects. However, equally interesting is the ability of all of these groups to start in one tempo and then shift to another, often repeatedly, until returning to the original tempo of the introduction to conclude the piece.

This technique has roots in older jazz. The idea of recapitulating the head melody after the improvisatory sections is primarily a bebop notion. Likewise, the ability to perform compositions at great speed was one of the established criteria for judging the skill level of an improviser. The famous “cutting contests” of the 1930s between performers on the same instrument had slowly

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<sup>150</sup> Litweiler, *A Harmolodic Life*, 73.

dictated those values to the bebop generation, shaping the mindset of young musicians, and helping to establish the standard by which all jazz musicians were then judged.

The shifting tempos are indicative not only of Ornette Coleman's work, but of a few other artists who were members of the 1960s avant-garde movement. But Coleman was a pioneer in this area. Earlier free jazz recordings such as Lennie Tristano's "Intuition" offer a lack of established harmony, but still have a consistent tempo overall. Charles Mingus's pieces sometimes make a musical statement in one tempo in an introductory section and then begin a new tempo which carries through the piece. Of Coleman's contemporaries, perhaps the only one that was also regularly making use of fluid or even indeterminate tempo was Cecil Taylor.

Dramatic tempo shifts are most common in Coleman's trio work, but somewhat less important in Prime Time, partially because of a desire to relate more easily to non-jazz audiences, and also because of the greater need for organization for such changes to occur equally effectively. A larger ensemble like Prime Time was certainly not as nimble as Coleman's trio and unplanned tempo shifts could have chaotic repercussions. In fact, there are instances in several live Prime Time performances ("City Living" on *Caravan of Dreams*) where the band does not make smooth transitions between melodic sections.

Pieces like *Free Jazz* and "Science Fiction," that have no opening melodic statements and are entirely freely improvised are ambiguous in terms of tempo. Multiple, simultaneous tempi can even be implied in both of these pieces.

Additionally, all of Coleman's ensembles frequently employ elements of superposition in terms of the counterpoint created between the melodic line and the rhythmic instruments. Often, Coleman's pieces are performed with a slow, legato theme which is under laid by a dense, nervous,

subdivided rhythmic pattern. In doing so, a clear, unified sense of tempo is obscured even in simpler pieces.

#### **4.1.5 Harmolodic Principle E: Intonation as a Device of Emotional Expression**

One of the most common criticisms of Coleman has often been his perceived refusal, sometimes described as an inability to play “in tune.” This critique is often a sub-point of a larger argument regarding Coleman’s lack of technical prowess when compared to other saxophonists of the same era, e.g. John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Sonny Rollins, and Sam Rivers.

Most of this criticism misses the point, and is based on a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the evolution of Afro American music. Coleman may sound out of tune to those accustomed to listening to more conservative forms of jazz, but from within its own sonic context, precise intonation is of little importance. To Coleman, what *is* important is the meaning that the sound is trying to convey. According to Coleman, “If I play a F in a song called ‘Peace,’ I think it should not sound exactly the same as if I play that note in a piece called ‘Sadness’”<sup>151</sup> Subtle changes in intonation reflect a greater desire for more emotional expression in the context of the character of the composition.

While bent notes, slides, scoops, growls, and other effects had long been a part of the jazz tradition, Coleman likely regarded them as only surface effects. He seemed to believe that the prevailing character or emotion of the piece should also extend to the underlying intonation. This

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<sup>151</sup> Joachim Berendt, *The Jazz Book*, New York: Lawrence Hill, 1968.

is more akin to the systems of tuning employed by Delta Blues musicians in the old South, who would tune their guitars differently depending on the music that they would perform on a given night or Hindustani artists who perform sacred pieces in different modes. Coleman adopted this approach for all of the instruments in his ensemble starting with himself. Guitarist James “Blood” Ulmer, who was a frequent member of Coleman’s ensembles in the 1970s, may have been the first to notice this correlation, and he developed a unique tuning for his guitar, which he later dubbed his “harmonodic tuning.”<sup>152</sup> Geoffrey Himes paraphrased Ulmer’s experience for *JazzTimes*.

This was 1972, and Ulmer moved into Coleman’s apartment and began to study with him every day. Coleman would call out unusual chord changes to see if the guitarist could keep up. This was so challenging that Ulmer was having trouble sleeping. One morning, in frustration, he tuned all six strings on his guitar to the same note. When Coleman called out a B-flat, Ulmer said, “I got no B-flat.” When Coleman called out an E-minor-seventh, Ulmer replied, “I ain’t got that either.” So they just started playing, and suddenly Ulmer sounded like no other guitarist in history; he was always going somewhere new because all the old patterns were gone. He was playing harmonodic guitar.<sup>153</sup>

But unlike early bluesmen, who mostly performed as individuals, Coleman’s groups added an extra layer of complexity, as each could arrive at their own variations of “harmonodic tuning,” and moments of intense dissonance are frequently heard in free improvisations.

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<sup>152</sup> Geoffrey Himes, “James “Blood” Ulmer and Vernon Reid: Harmonodic Blues, *JazzTimes*, August 2006. <http://jazztimes.com/articles/17056-james-blood-ulmer-and-vernon-reid-harmonodic-blues>

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



#### **4.1.6 Harmolodic Principle F: Free Choice of Register**

Coleman's music also contains elements of compositional indeterminacy in regards to register. This is due to the harmolodic ideal that instrumentalists are free to interpret the main melody of the work in a manner of their own choosing, thus preserving their individuality as artists within the larger group context. Some might argue that this is true of all jazz performances, but Coleman's practices are more extensive in that all instruments are allowed to participate by shifting their lines, not just the instrument performing the melody.

Simple variations of melodic material such as shifting phrases, or even entire lines up or down an octave are a common occurrence. This is a quality of Coleman's improvisation employed with great success by artists who perform his pieces as well. Chris Potter's interpretation of "Law Years," for example, makes use of octave transpositions as a means to arrive at greater musical variety in a fairly simple melodic phrase.

The process is not limited to octave jumps. Often Coleman will decide to transpose a melodic line by a third. This is perhaps a reminiscence of his misunderstanding of the relationship between the transposing alto saxophone and the concert key. Consequentially, one could argue that there is no transposition that could be considered to be "right" in harmolodics as instruments—transposing and non-transposing—are also often called to read off of the same part.. In doing so, Coleman was able to arrive at a vast world of indeterminate harmonic creations. He decided the instrumentation but varied performances of the melodic line are still created through the decisions of the other band members.

This idea of free interpretation also links with harmolodic principle two. An effect of this system is that the bassline, melody, harmony etc. can all be inverted and shifted around with

respect to one another. The basic musical hierarchy of “primary” and “supporting” has been eliminated because all parts are interchangeable and hence all are equally valid. Coleman described this idea to Howard Mandel. “In fact, that’s how I see harmolodics: That you can take a melody, and use it as a bass line. Or a second part. Or as a lead. Or as a rhythm. I do it in all the music that I play.”<sup>154</sup>

This subversion of typical musical roles leads to a more egalitarian concept of jazz as a communicative and interactive art form. Coleman’s musicians are never restricted by the traditional roles of their instruments nor by what their instruments are expected to play. All artists are drawing from the same melodic line, and all interpretations are equally valid and carry the same weight within the ensemble.

#### **4.1.7 Harmolodic Principle G: An Orchestral Approach to Sound**

Coleman’s orchestral vision of sound may have been the reason behind Prime Time’s creation in the first place. His attempts to work progressively with larger ensembles up until *Skies of America* were evidence of a search for greater sonic power and variety. After losing Columbia’s financial backing, and spending time with a type of improvising orchestra in Morocco, Coleman settled for electric amplification as an acceptable substitute for the dynamic capabilities of the orchestra, and realized that his own harmolodic approaches had a similar precedent in non-western cultures. The Jajouka experience had proven that his ideas not only had merit, but had been in practice

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<sup>154</sup> Mandel, *Miles, Ornette, Cecil*, 118.

successfully for thousands of years. The electrically driven motives of Prime Time were in many ways a testing ground for lessons learned through years of experience with different ensembles in search of greater expressiveness, and the great improvising orchestra.

While Jajouka may have been the confirmation of the idea, its roots in Coleman's writing go back much further. The conception of the "double quartet" from *Free Jazz* was recaptured through the involvement of a double rhythm section in many of Coleman's later pieces which use two drummers and sometimes two bassists. Likewise, several Prime Time recordings include two drummers and two guitarists. This is yet another reason why Coleman's usage of electric instruments should not be lumped in with the jazz-rock "fusion" movement of the 1970s. Even if the musicians arrived in the same aesthetic space, the motivations for such a shift and the routes taken in exploring that musical space were much different.

Since Coleman was never fully able to finish his book, harmolodics remains an enigmatic concept. However, by using Coleman's recordings and descriptions as a guide, one can determine that such a governing system really did exist in Coleman's mind. While the theory may have never actually codified, it is clear that Coleman adhered to his own set of unique principles in conceptualizing and performing his own works. Harmolodics was real, and the results of its applications can still be heard on his recordings.

## 4.2 HARMOLODICS APPLIED AS MUSICAL PHILOSOPHY

### 4.2.1 Coleman's Musical Theories as Expressed in the Music of Prime Time (1985-1995)

After 1985, the Prime Time group began to attract a higher level of attention from jazz audiences and made forays into the public consciousness. The event that led to this breakthrough was Coleman's involvement with the Caravan of Dreams in Fort Worth, a concert that not only pushed Coleman and his music into the spotlight again, but also functioned as a proving ground for the Prime Time ensemble. Since recordings from the group's performances at the Caravan exist, the structure of Coleman's compositions for his electric ensemble can be evaluated in comparison to the music made before 1980. The following section will show how Coleman refined his compositional ideas during the period from 1985-1995, or from when Prime Time reemerged into the public consciousness until Coleman ceased to use that moniker and instrumentation for his primary ensemble.

As stated in Chapter 2, Prime Time's foundation was focused on recapturing the improvisatory techniques that Coleman had experienced in Jajouka in 1973. Coleman had initially wanted to create a type of improvising orchestra, but without the necessary funding for so many trained musicians, he opted for an electric ensemble that could also easily achieve the wide range of expressiveness that his music demanded.

*Opening the Caravan of Dreams* (1985) was the first Coleman record to officially refer to the band as Prime Time on the album cover. While the recording is of a live performance, several elements of the Jajouka sound are present in the composition. For example, the melody to "City

Living” is a freely improvised piece built around a 10 note motive played as a constant riff by different instruments individually, in succession, while the others improvise contrapuntal lines.

But something slightly different is happening on “City Living” than the more common riff based creations that Coleman had performed in the past. Even though there is a clear beat in the piece, the meter is still ambiguous. Coleman also places the transitional material differently in each repetition. It is heard after 24, 15, or 12, repetitions of the main riff each time it returns. Compared to pieces like “Theme From a Symphony,” which have a more clearly defined sense of time during the opening passages, this is another step toward the Jajouka method of improvisation, where meter is still defined solely by the melodic component and Coleman’s directions on stage. Furthermore, Coleman occasionally decides to omit a repetition here and there and embellishes the melodic line on a whim, sometimes opting to add grace notes to the main motive. The Figure 9, below shows the main motive of “City Living” and the transitional melodic material.

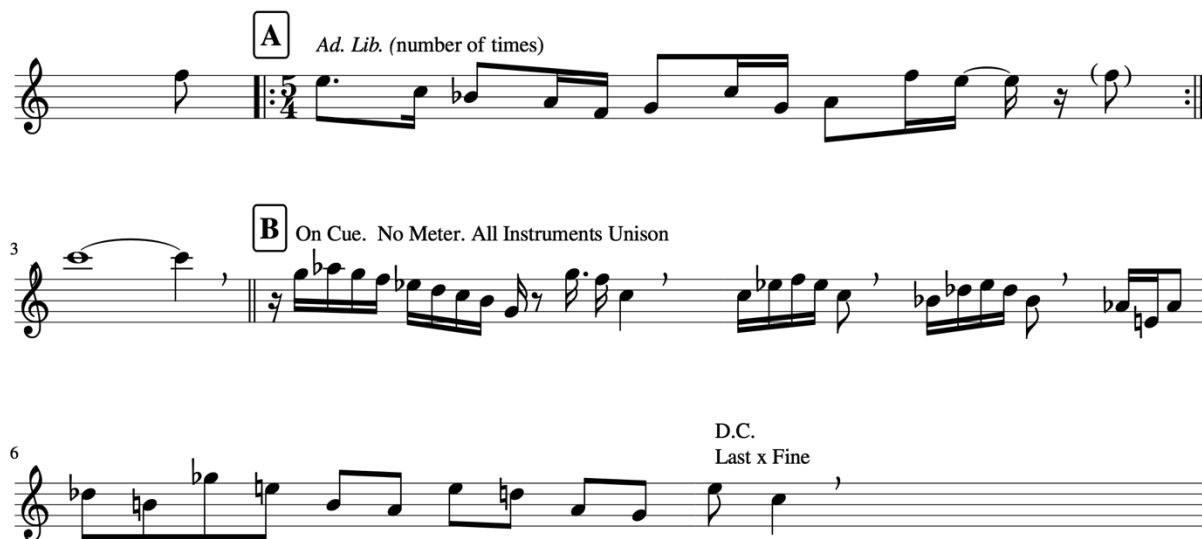


Figure 9: “City Living” (1985)

When compared to the earlier riff-based pieces recorded in the 1970s, “City Living” also contains a higher degree of contrast in its performance. Dynamic ranges are much more varied, as is the number of improvised counter lines at particular points. The post-Jajouka recordings that Coleman had made on *Body Meta* or *Dancing in Your Head* for example, seem more homogenous by comparison.

This is clear when one examines the spectrogram representations. As seen in the examples below, the spectrogram of “City Living” contains a much lower amount of sound saturation than the one generated by “Theme from a Symphony.” In Figures 10 and 11, the clearly defined sounds register as white/light gray dots and lines (50% black saturation and below on the gray scale), while the dark gray (50% black saturation and above on the gray scale) is representative of soft, less defined sounds, background elements, and sonic decay/reverberation. Completely black (100% saturation) represents a lack of any sound. The percent change ( $\Delta$ ) in the gray scale is indicative of the relative intensity (amplitude) and definition (contrast) of a given sound against the background elements and other musical sound.

The blurred vertical lines that consistently permeate each spectrogram image are representations of the sound generated by the drum kit, which produces the largest amount of sound, but also the sound with the greatest levels of sonic saturation and spread due to the relatively long decay time of the cymbals and bass drum combined with the multitude of consecutive attacks. Since the drums are also unpitched, their overtone spectrum appears more like a solid vertical line than the pitched instruments, which can be identified by their parallel, horizontal shapes.

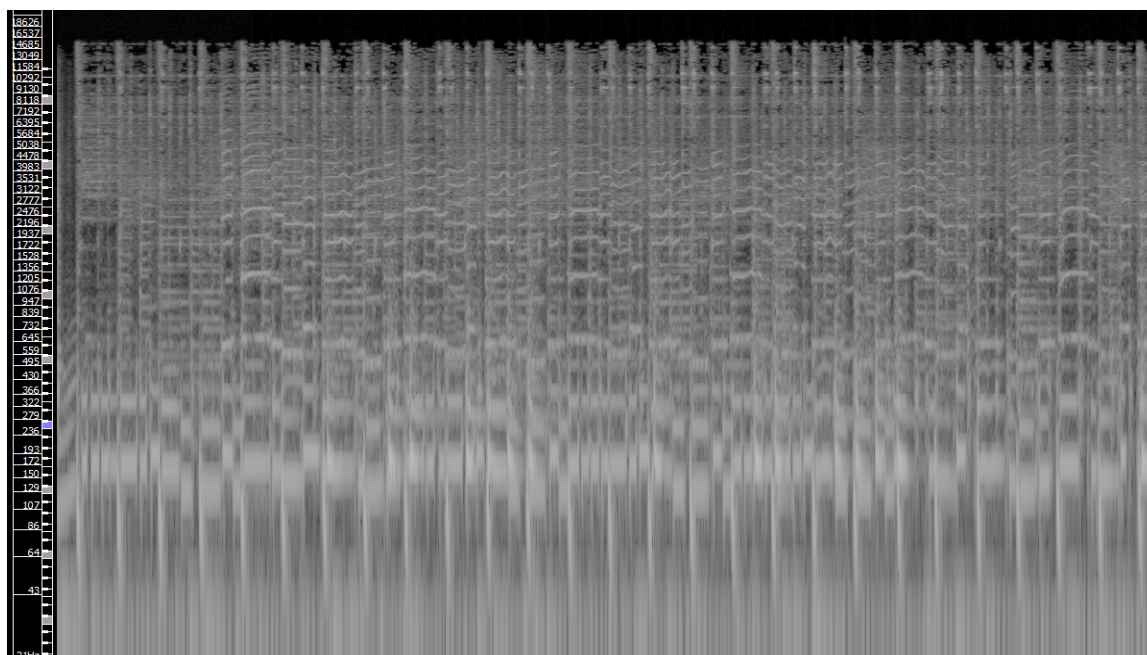


Figure 10: Spectrogram image of the first eight repeated riffs of “Theme from a Symphony” (1975)

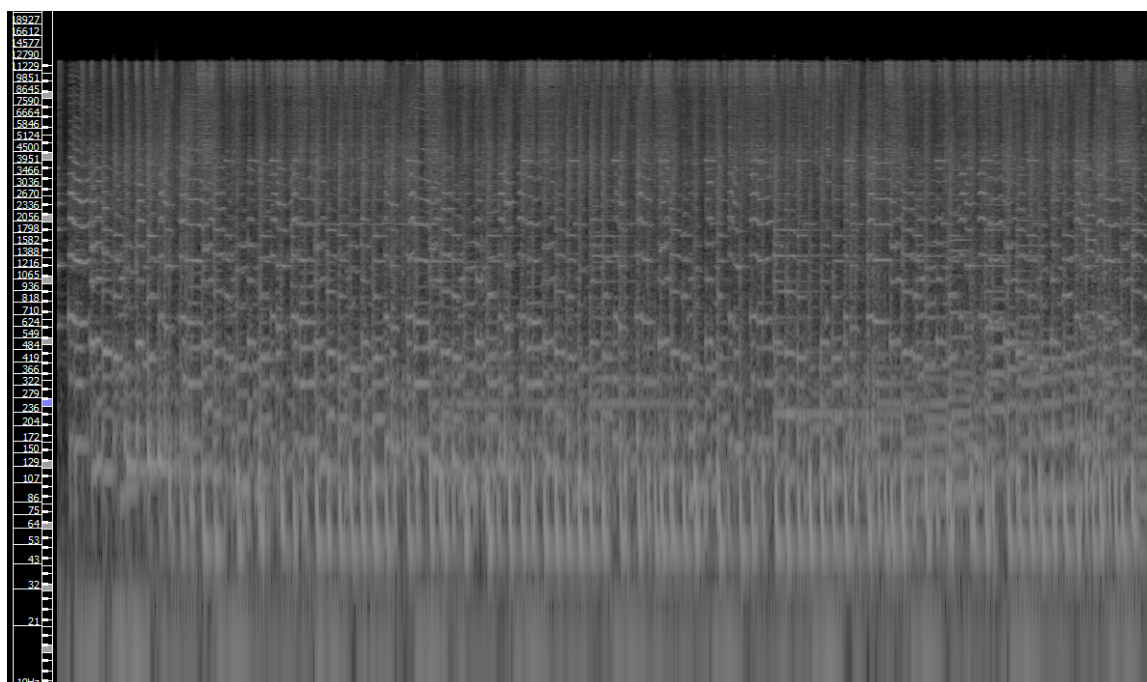


Figure 11: The first eight repetitions of the main motive of “City Living” (1985)

Despite the sonic saturation from the drum kit due to “City Living” being recorded live, its overall amplitude variance is greater than that of “Theme from a Symphony.” While this may not be immediately apparent upon looking at the two examples, a color saturation analysis supports this conclusion.

Omitting the frequency range above the low pass filter (the solid black space seen at the top of each spectrogram), the gray scale in the complete spectral image of “City Living” extends from 91% black saturation to 25% black saturation, ( $\Delta 66\%$ ). The complete image of “Theme from a Symphony” ranges from 89% black saturation to 38% black saturation ( $\Delta 51\%$ ). The greater  $\Delta$  value in City Living suggests it possesses a wider amplitude range, or level of dynamic contrast than “Theme from a Symphony.” The recordings on *Body Meta* display a similar trend with “Voice Poetry,” ( $\Delta 45\%$ ), “Home Grown” ( $\Delta 40\%$ ), “Macho Woman” ( $\Delta 38\%$ ), “Fou Amour” ( $\Delta 51\%$ ), and “European Echoes” ( $\Delta 42\%$ ).

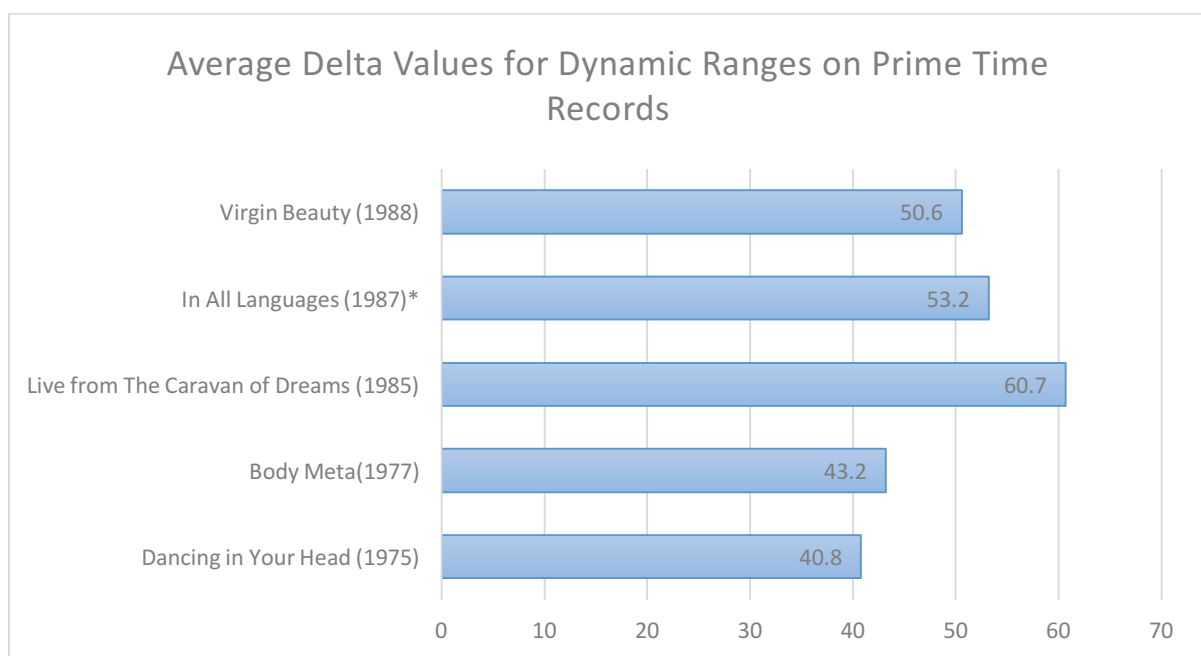
One might argue that such contrast is suppressed in the studio environment through mixing and mastering by the audio engineer. However, when “Theme from a Symphony” is compared with other, later performances of riff-based Coleman themes, even those recorded in a studio it still shows a lower  $\Delta$  value. For example, “3 Wishes” from *Virgin Beauty* (which is the closest in terms of arrangement to “Theme”) has a saturation range from 89% to 31%, a  $\Delta$  of 58 points. Furthermore, the presence of an audio engineer at the Caravan of Dreams (in which performance spaces were permanently equipped with state of the art recording equipment) indicates that the difference cannot be singularly explained by the change of venue or engineering preferences.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Due to the more extensive use of dynamic range compression (DRC) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, sometimes described as the “loudness war,” pre-1990 vinyl copies of Coleman’s compositions were used for this study in order to get the most accurate results possible. Recordings were then electronically converted for spectrogram analysis using



While the analysis is not definitive by any means, it *is* indicative of Coleman’s utilization of a wide compositional palette, including a greater use of musical silence, and the transition of Prime Time from a harmolodic funk/jazz band, to more of an electric, freely improvising orchestra. The changes in personnel at the end of the 1980s would also support this conclusion and Coleman would eventually hire classically trained musicians to perform his music.



**Figure 12: Average Delta (% change) values for Prime Time albums. (Same ensemble used for all recordings except *Virgin Beauty*)**

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the freeware program *Audacity*. If vinyl recordings could not be obtained, CDs pre-1990 were sought out. If only post-1990 recordings or reissues were able to be located, the recordings were omitted from the study.

The chart gives the average dynamic change (difference in amplitude between the softest and loudest sounds) for each record that Prime Time made from 1975 to 1988.<sup>156</sup> From this data a clear trend towards more dynamic variation is visible in Coleman's recordings. Each record released after 1980 is nearly 10 percentage points higher in dynamic variance than those released in the 1970s.

These changes can partially be explained by a greater synthesis of Jajouka inspired sounds with jazz or classical techniques. While Coleman's compositions recorded after 1985 frequently employed riffs, they were seldom composed solely of riffs. Instead, Coleman limited his stylistic use of melodic fragments to single sections, often adding a bridge or some other melodic material after a concrete number of repetitions. In doing so, he allowed the other instrumentalists to move away from homogenous textures and patterns, and stagnant harmonies. They also left more room for phrase breaks and pauses, and contained a greater use of silence for dramatic effect. These newly developed "riff hybrid" compositions were a kind of synthesis between Coleman's old music and the more experimental Prime Time pieces.<sup>157</sup>

As previously explained, Prime Time was first formed as an attempt to recapture the Jajouka sound with Western instruments. When listening to recordings of the Master Musicians (both with Coleman and without) the dynamic range of the instruments is minimal. Since the musicians were most often hired to perform for Sufi religious events, their goal was primarily to induce a trance-like state in the minds of their listeners. In order to do so the compositions and

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<sup>156</sup> As stated above, recordings suspected of using high levels of DRC were omitted from the study. *Of Human Feelings* (1979) could not be located other than in a reissued format. For this same reason, *Tone Dialing* is omitted from the analysis due to its original issue date in 1995. \*Only the Prime Time side of *In All Languages* was analyzed using color saturation methodology.

<sup>157</sup> This thematic idea is explored further in section 4.2.2.

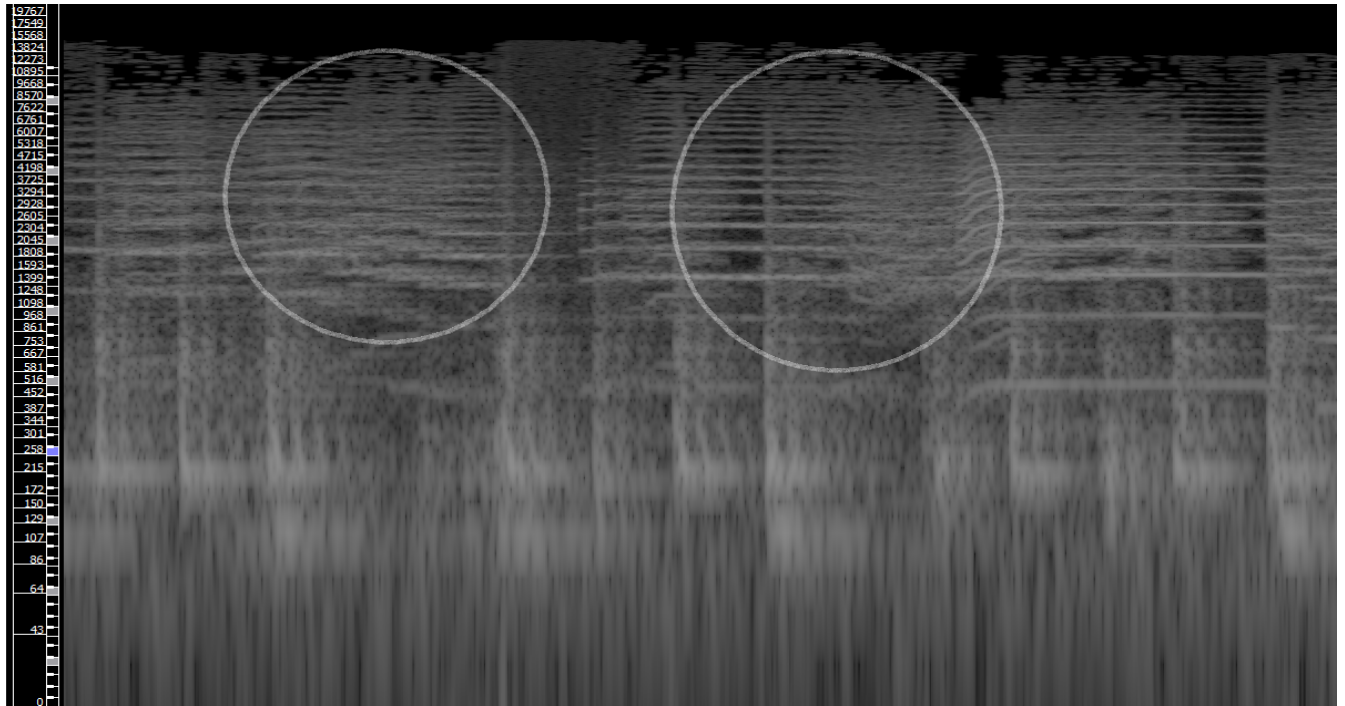
improvisations that they employed seldom included any periods of resting or any real variation in dynamics. As a result, the sound is nearly constant and continuous, with the only variables being the manipulation of the melodic line and the tempos of the musical sections. Those early Prime Time recordings share that approach to music, producing an electric trance band effect. Both the Prime Time sound and the Jajouka sound share this quality of nearly continuous sound production by all instruments involved; both ensembles create a kind of droning effect. The Jajouka group achieves this through a distinct heterophonic texture that could even be described as reminiscent of a Coleman “unison.”

The Coleman recordings demonstrate a similar effort, usually based on continuous strumming, or sustained notes played on the electric guitar, which sporadically find points of “unison” or intersection with the lead guitar and the saxophone. The spectrograms in Figures 13 and 14 show this effect. The circled regions illustrate where the droning effect occurs followed by moving lines and moments of instrumental heterophony. In other words, sections where the sustained lines break and the band plays running lines together, but in a loose, unorganized fashion.

The transcription in Figure 15 highlights the strumming pattern of Charles Ellerbee’s guitar on the piece “Voice Poetry,” another repetitious effect employed extensively by Coleman during this time. While the droning may have its roots in the Jajouka sound, the guitar riff is a combination of two separate techniques. Rhythmic strumming patterns like this one are common in the music of several contemporary R&B musicians like James Brown, and Parliament Funkadelic, and are also utilized by the more adventurous Captain Beefheart and Frank Zappa. The rhythmic effect is likely borrowed from that context.

Yet unlike the aforementioned musicians, the harmony created by Ellerbee is largely static and does not cycle through a predictable number or pattern (a chorus) of harmonic changes. It is this

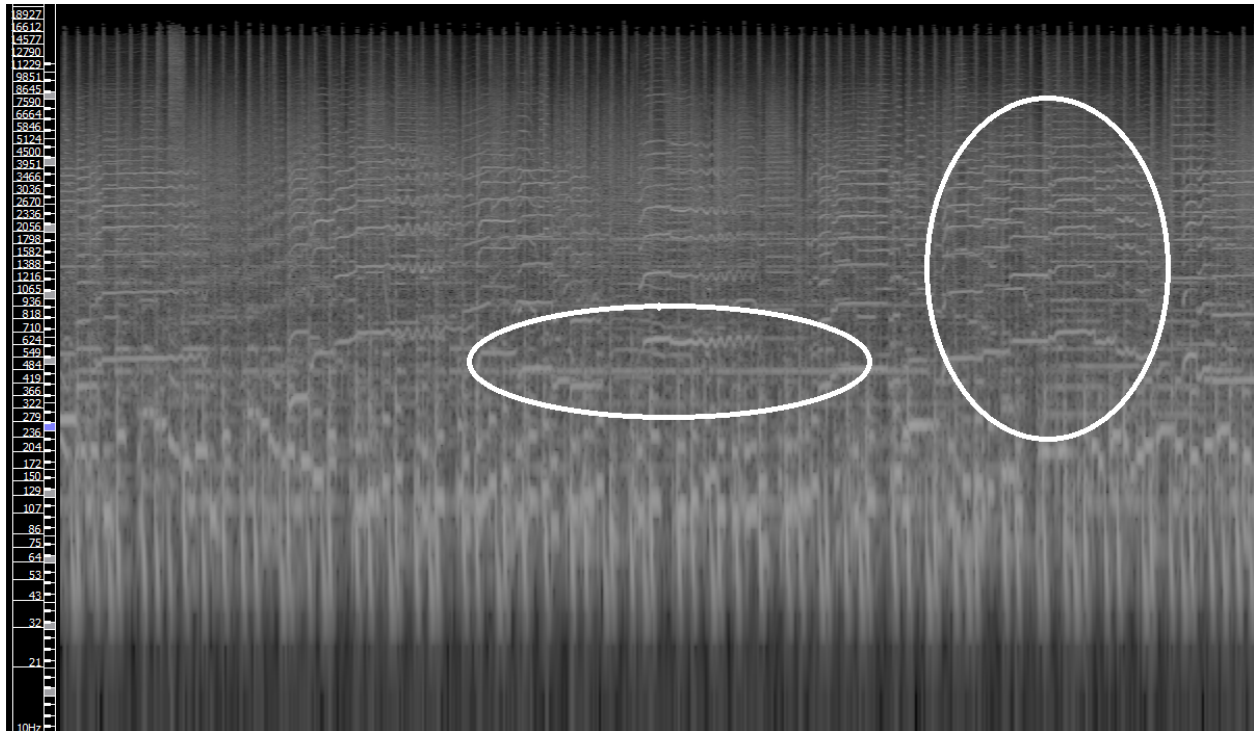
lack of harmonic direction that makes it similar to an ostinato or even the aforementioned “droning” patterns of Jajouka. Coleman’s Prime Time group was creating a hybrid of the two musical styles, merging Coleman’s early love of R&B with his non-Western experiences. In this context, even non riff-based compositions have elements of riffing and repetitive phrases.



**Figure 13: Sections of clearly defined droning followed by running heterophonic passages in “Midnight Sunrise,” (1975) performed by Coleman with the Master Musicians of Jajouka.**

In the 1980s, Coleman was less interested in merely replicating the Jajouka sound with Western elements. Instead, he was striving for a grand synthesis of that music and his own harmolodic methods. As other scholars (Mandel, Wilson) have implied, Coleman’s Prime Time ensemble was formed as a result of his experiences in Jajouka. But since these scholars do not

discuss Coleman's recordings after 1985, they had not noticed that these experiences were not the primary motivation for Coleman's later work. Instead, Coleman re-embraced some of his sonic tactics from the 1960s, even going to far as to revisit the original quartet from 1959 though with new compositions infused with the techniques learned in the past two decades.



**Figure 14: Sections of droning guitar effects followed by heterophonic passages of guitar and saxophone on “Voice Poetry” (1977)**

The musical score is for the song "Voice Poetry" and is written in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for "ELECTRIC GUITAR 2" and contains two measures of whole rests. The middle staff is for the "DRUM SET" and is marked "AD. LIB" (Ad Libitum). It contains two measures of a rhythmic pattern: a quarter note, an eighth note, a quarter note, and a half note. The bottom staff is a vocal line, marked with a "3" above the first measure, indicating a triplet. It contains two measures of a melodic line in G major, with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4 in the first measure and G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4 in the second measure.

Figure 15: Ellerbee’s riff patterns and rhythmic vamp on “Voice Poetry”

1987 saw the release of *In All Languages*, which featured both Prime Time and the original Ornette Coleman Quartet performing the same compositions. There are no completely riff based pieces on the album but Coleman incorporates a few pieces that use repetitious riffs in their construction, most notably “Peace Warriors” and “The Art of Love is Happiness” (originally titled “Police People” on *Song X*). Both of these pieces demonstrate this technique, and their melodies have been transcribed in Figure 16.



**Figure 16: “The Art of Love is Happiness” (1987) or (“Police People” (1985)) with distinct riffs and their variations marked as A or B.**

As one might expect, both the Prime Time and quartet recordings display greater dynamic variety than the Prime Time recordings from the previous decade. And after 1985, Coleman’s groups almost completely ended their performances and recordings of purely riff based compositions. None appear on *Song X*, *In All Languages* or *Virgin Beauty*. *Song X* was understandably even more in line with Coleman’s jazz background because it was not a Prime Time recording. But after *Song X*, all of Coleman’s music seemed to shift in that direction. This was not only influenced by Coleman’s unending desire to refine his music, but also socially motivated as well.

While other riff hybrid compositions strictly adhere to a previously designed form, “3 Wishes” from *Virgin Beauty* has more in common with pieces of the 1970s version of Coleman’s riff melodies. Whereas the previously mentioned pieces contain fixed numbers of repetitions, “3

Wishes” repeats its A material a different number of times at each occurrence. The only fixed passage is the B theme, which is always played three times before returning to the A melody. Furthermore, the droning effect returns in this piece due to the sounding of a sustained C on the trumpet at various points, reinforcing the overall key area as C harmonic minor. Of all the riff based themes that Coleman developed in the 1980s, this one is most akin to his work immediately following his time spent in Jajouka in terms of form, and overall character.

In the 1980s jazz was held in higher esteem than it had been in the past. No longer thought of as a kind of “pop music,” jazz was more respected and even studied academically; it was canonized as one of the greatest achievements of American culture. Coleman was no longer negatively affected by the moniker of “jazz musician,” although he never wholeheartedly embraced it either. At the same time, he was one of the last remaining icons of the genre and a role model for scores of younger artists. All of these changes indicated that it was not only permissible for Coleman to pursue that artistic direction again, but incentivized through the potential for greater understanding and social/financial reward. The collaborations with Pat Metheny and later Jerry Garcia indicate that Coleman was aware that he could reach both mainstream jazz listeners and pop music audiences if he found the right formulas (and perhaps the right niche audiences).

These riff hybrid compositions were one of the most common idioms that Prime Time developed in the 1980s. While each of these pieces uses a different form, they each incorporate a version of a repetitive phrase in their structure. Coleman’s new techniques of bridging his Jajouka inspired sound with the jazz idioms that he had developed in earlier decades showcased the band’s versatility to a greater extent than in the 1970s. As Prime Time’s style became refined, it also became less adventurous, and less shocking than in previous decades. Compared to a recording



like *Body Meta*, an album like *Virgin Beauty* seems slick, planned, put-together, well-packaged, and even slightly commercial. Not words frequently associated with Coleman's music in the past.

But it also became more melodically diverse, less monotonous, and more heterogeneous, with a greater focus on subtlety, timbres, dynamics, and orchestration. By the time that *In All Languages* was released, Coleman had spent 50 years experimenting and refining his harmolodic techniques. By this point in his career his music reflected all of his experiences and skills.

The exploration of these new forms was not limited to the electric groups. Not only had Coleman outgrown the idea of performing only one unique type of music, he had decided that he couldn't be limited by the compositional palette afforded to him by just one ensemble. This may have been the strongest reason for dissolving the Prime Time band after 1995.

When *Tone Dialing* was released that year, it contained familiar types of compositions but its orchestration was varied. It included rappers, electronic effects, and was unlike any other album that Coleman had ever recorded in terms of the sheer myriad of sounds present on the album. The ensembles are again quite dense, and the album takes a less commercial turn than what was created for *Virgin Beauty*. But it also shows the incorporation of contemporary elements into Coleman's music. Hip hop grooves, rap lyrics, and electronic effects are all enmeshed with Prime Time's free funk rhythms. 1995 also saw a return to the use of complete collective improvisation on two tracks and the near absence of sequential soloing, another device that had resurfaced in Coleman's records from the 1980s.

*Tone Dialing* was also the last time that Prime Time would make a studio record. But it incorporates the full compositional spectrum of the group throughout its evolution. In terms of its harmolodic nature, it is probably the most complete in terms of the kinds of compositions recorded

and but lacks in overall cohesiveness. The album almost sounds like an Ornette Coleman “mix tape.”

Coleman’s exploration of greater dynamic variety ends with this record. Instead, Coleman seems so occupied with his use of new coloristic ideas (Indian tabla, electronic percussion, sampling, hip-hop lyrics, studio reverb, etc.) that he abandons the more refined, slightly symphonic, musical direction that *Prime Time* seemed to be taking at the end of the 1980s. This is not to say that the compositions themselves are uninteresting or uninspired, but the band’s treatment of the works seems largely predictable from within the context of the record. Aside from the effects and orchestration there are few surprises on *Tone Dialing* and even fewer standout moments. Even Coleman’s new classically guitarists, for all of their skill and virtuosity, lack the explosive energy of Tacuma, Ellerbie, and Nix, and seem less ready to take risks with their improvisations. One might argue that Coleman was always better when he attempted to do more with less, as opposed to having access to unrestricted instrumentation.

But what is most interesting about this release is not its several nods to the zeitgeist or even the techniques of the new musicians. For the first time in years, Coleman was not recording only his own music. In fact, one of the pieces performed on *Tone Dialing* is a harmolodic interpretation of the Prelude from Cello Suite No. 1 by J. S. Bach. During the first half of the piece, the melody is played on the electric guitar and set to an electronic beat layered with other percussive and coloristic samples. In the second half, the saxophone enters with copious amounts of reverb and injects erratic, improvised lines over the top of the guitar, whose original harmonic passages are now subverted through the newly improvised bass lines and dancelike drumbeat.

So what might inspire Coleman, a composer who normally abstained from consistent harmonic progressions and solo melodic lines, to record a piece composed for a single instrument

and that is almost completely made up of arpeggiated chords governed by common practice rules of harmony and voice leading?

Firstly, Coleman was more seriously regarded as a composer by the end of the 1980s. His relationship to the traditional musical establishment had shifted, mostly due to the influence that jazz musicians had gained in the academic and political landscape. Coleman was regarded as a master musician, and perceived himself able to appreciate and understand other composers in other great musical traditions. For this reason, a recording that might have been ridiculed in 1964, largely passed under the radar in 1994. He probably chose this time to record his own version of such a piece simply because he now had the cultural collateral to do so.

Secondly, Coleman's new Prime Time ensemble was formed with two classical musicians as members; Ken Wessal and Chris Rosenberg had an understanding of baroque music that probably went beyond the knowledge that Coleman possessed. Their addition to the group was a kind of bridge from that language to his, just as he had done with the Jajouka musicians. For an artist whose music consistently attempted to defy category, attempting to merge elements of jazz, classical, and contemporary popular music was not necessarily a stretch. His first forays into that territory had occurred over 20 years prior, with *Chappaqua Suite*, and had peaked with the composition of *Skies of America*. Coleman was essentially just pushing those concepts further by infusing them with new popular vocabulary.

Thirdly, and most importantly, "Bach Prelude," as well as all of the other pieces on *Tone Dialing* were musical representations of a kind of creative manifesto that Coleman had been exploring for the last few decades of his career. Prime Time's contribution to harmolodics lay not only in capturing cultural elements and merging stylistic traits, but also by creating a musical philosophy that attempted to destroy what Coleman perceived to be a metaphorical "caste system"

of musical sound. He had originally remarked on this idea many years ago through conversations with Lenard Bernstein.

If you had the ability to play the violin, you could play what you wanted. If you could sing the blues, you could sing any song. But the music community only allows you the territory that serves its ends. I can play music in any territory—anywhere, with anybody. And that's what I've opted to do.<sup>158</sup>

Let's put it this way. On this planet, there is human expression, which has been related through art for many years. But this expression has not been free of categories or preconceptions. I think of myself as a composer. I could write music for any musician. I don't think of someone I want to play with, I think of something I want to do musically and, if I can draw people to me who are interested, I'll do it.<sup>159</sup>

By drawing from the language of these three areas, and others as well, Coleman is again undermining the idea that there should be separated categories of musical sound. He, the composer, is the only one who can determine how the instrumentation of his ensemble should function, what pieces they can play, and how those instruments should sound. In other words, artistic choices should be left in the hands of the artist and not the expectations of the audience (or anyone else for that matter). When talking about *Tone Dialing* in particular, it seemed that Coleman was especially interested in targeting the critics in terms of how and why they controlled information and formed cultural taste. The first edition of *Tone Dialing* was issued with a jigsaw puzzle originally sent to reviewers and music critics. When completed it reads "Remove the caste system from sound."

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<sup>158</sup> Shoemaker, "Dialing Up Ornette," *Jazztimes*. 54.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.



Figure 17: Completed jigsaw puzzle enclosed with the first edition release of *Tone Dialing*.

Coleman was deliberately confronting these prescribed notions of what constitutes genre, and whether or not such a system of category is important other than in terms of the commodification of music. He remarked to Bill Shoemaker of *JazzTimes*,

America is more of an improvised society. When you think of classical, jazz, folk, or ethnic music, most people think in racial terms rather than in descriptions of what they like. You don't describe things you like by race; you describe them with the words that show how you recognize what it is and who put it together. But in music, rock represents white, jazz represents black, classical music represents Europeans, and on down the line. But all the music that's played in America is really played with the same exact notes that come from the European system. It's five years from the year 2000 and I don't think any ethnic group, regardless of how it relates to its and past and its roots, is getting their full freedom of expression in this system.... Yet, for some reason America builds a caste system in the

business concept. It's a way to avoid relationships with other races and enjoying creativity from outside their [own] identity. The puzzle covers more territory than just sound, but that's its meaning in dealing with music.<sup>160</sup>

So the challenge that Coleman was presenting was not limited to merely asserting that taste was governed by racial and social stratification, but also an attempt to encourage listeners to think about what music they chose to listen to and why. It was culturally reflexive as well as self-reflexive. As previously mentioned, his thoughts that challenge artistic concepts of aesthetics, and differentiation between “high” or “low” art, completely in sync with jazz’s rising status as a music of cultural significance and the beginnings of the academic study of popular music.

He also challenged this hierarchy in his music on all of the pieces presented on *Tone Dialing*. The record not only incorporates elements from pop, jazz, European classical, and ethnic musics, but gives each an equal representation. More often than not, all of these elements are present in some way or another on the individual tracks and their level in the mix is consistently even with Coleman’s. This is partially why the album seems so monotonous, the dynamic ranges of the instruments are not mastered in a typical fashion.

By 1994, Coleman had arrived at a similar level of refinement with *Prime Time* as he had in 1971 when he brought Asha Puthli in to work with his nine-piece acoustic project on *Science Fiction*. All instruments, all colors were “equal” in terms of their contribution to the overall music being created.

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<sup>160</sup> Shoemaker, “Dialing,” 56.

However, Coleman's renewed interpretations of harmolodics allowed the musicians of his ensembles not only to make free exchanges of parts (basslines substituted for melody etc.) but enabled them to essentially do whatever they wanted all of the time; to not feel restricted by the typical roles of their instruments or even their intended, "correct" usage. Harmolodics was a method of creating music solely based on feeling rather than any kind of tradition, or concrete method. Coleman was again thinking about juxtaposition, but this time in terms of how to unravel something familiar, in this case to change the perception of a beloved piece of instrumental music.

Take the Bach piece. When I was putting together a new Prime Time band, I went to the Manhattan School of Music and they told me about Chris Rosenberg the classical guitar player. So, I met with him and asked him what was his favorite classical piece, and he said the Bach Prelude. I asked him to play it and then I asked him to play it again, and I improvised on my horn, harmolodically. So, you can hear the true essence of harmolodics in the Bach piece. Chris plays the identical notes, the same thing, twice, back to back. But, when the whole band comes in, it sounds like he's playing some kind of harmony or changes. Yet he's playing the same melody. The melody hasn't changed; it's been heightened so that you can compare how new information makes the use of a form [clearer.] What we call melody, harmony, and changes are titles that were applied to a certain growth in music at a certain point in time. I don't have new words for what those words mean, but I have found how not to let those terms affect something that I found that enhances what those terms can mean. Harmolodics doesn't change something from its original state. It expresses the information a melody has within its structure without taking it apart to find out why it sounds that way.<sup>161</sup>

Coleman is now talking in terms of context, something that is hinted at in earlier discussions of the harmolodic method but had never been fully fleshed out. In placing an obvious and well-known composition in a new sonic area he was giving yet another piece of the puzzle of what it means to play harmolodically.

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<sup>161</sup> Shoemaker, "Dialing," 55.

Coleman had previously mentioned his compositional ideas in terms of placing melodic lines in different clefs, or being read by transposing instruments and non-transposing instruments simultaneously. He had also voiced a preference that new harmonies should be improvised with each repetition of his themes (referred to in section 4.1.2 as Harmolodic Principle B), and had discussed his preference for intonation being decided by the “character” or “feeling” of a particular piece (4.1.5, Harmolodic Principle D). But here, he points out an overarching theme for all of his music: context *matters*.

Someone may tell you that B and F are a flatted fifth apart, but they’re also the major seventh of C and F#. But, they don’t sound like that when you play them back to back. Your information may be limited, but the way you use the information doesn’t have to be limited. Your tone will cause you to change any note to the way you hear it. Your relationship to your tone is based on your emotions. If it wasn’t, everybody would sound the same. When you play something and you hear your own tone, that’s tone dialing. That’s you. If you create music just from the concept of your own tone, you will be doing something no one else has discovered.<sup>162</sup>

Simply by placing the Bach piece in a different sonic context, Coleman had completely changed its character. More importantly, he was suggesting that there are essentially no absolutes in terms of music. All tones are “in tune” or “out of tune” simply based on their relationship to a key or even just to another note. Even the idea that pitches are “out of tune” can be uprooted by not applying a tuning system employed by composers of 19<sup>th</sup> century European art music. Coleman had arrived at the crux and limitations of any kind of theoretical model, methodology, or school of thought, that being that the method only makes sense in the proper context. By the 1990s, he

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<sup>162</sup> Shoemaker, “Dialing,” 56.



had clearly shown that harmolodics was an abstract philosophy of music. It was not a theory or methodology that others could easily replicate. It was his own unique musical identity.

#### **4.2.2 Coleman's Music After 1995**

After Coleman stopped recording with Prime Time, his compositional tastes turned in another direction. Whereas *Tone Dialing* featured several experiments with electronics, vocals, and a wide compositional palette with a range of musicians, later releases would use smaller ensembles. In the years after the founding of Harmolodic Records, Coleman was as busy as he had been in the 1960s. He appeared on four recordings over the next two years amidst a busy touring and performance schedule.

He released two recordings with Geri Allen in 1996, both entitled *Sound Museum* but each with a unique subtitle: *Three Women* and *Hidden Man*. The collaborations were a result of Coleman's cameo on Allen's *Eyes In the Back of Your Head*, which was recorded the previous year.

For the first time in nearly 40 years, Coleman had decided not to showcase any new material on a recording aside from the title track, opting instead to do new versions of some of his previously recorded material. Even more unusual however, is the fact that both records feature the same compositions. Unlike *In All Languages*, which used two different ensembles to record different versions, both versions of *Sound Museum* have the same lineup consisting of Coleman, Allen, Moffett, and Denardo Coleman. It would seem that Coleman was reinforcing the idea of a compositional "summary" at this point. *Tone Dialing* had featured all his types of compositions, and *Sound Museum* captures a variety of pieces from the 1960s ("European Echoes"), 1970s

(“What Reason,” “Home Grown,” “Macho Woman,” “Monsieur Allard,”), and 1980s (“City Living,” “Stopwatch,” “Picolo Pesos,” “Biosphere,” “Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” “Mob Job”), and one traditional melody, “What A Friend We Have in Jesus.”

In this sense the recordings are in fact a “sound museum,” a retrospective of Coleman’s compositions up to that point, and a kind of musical capstone to his work with Prime Time. As a portrait, *Sound Museum* was more comprehensive in scope than any other recording, tracing Coleman’s compositional trajectory from learning church melodies as a boy all the way through the other decades of his work. It also makes perfect sense that he would want all of the pieces recorded twice, to demonstrate that the music was constantly changing and never played the same way more than once.

By examining the recording of “European Echoes,” originally recorded during the trio period, one can get an idea of how much Coleman had changed over the last few decades.

Coleman recorded “European Echoes” at three different times in his career, once with the trio at the Golden Circle in Stockholm, once with Prime Time on *Body Meta*, and once (technically twice) with an acoustic quartet on *Sound Museum*. The waltz-like theme to the piece is transcribed in Figure 18.



Figure 18: Main theme of “European Echoes” as recorded on *Sound Museum* (1995).

In *Sound Museum*, “European Echoes” is simplified from its original version for its use with the quartet, the “B” section is removed, and the piece loses the spontaneity of its earlier recorded versions.<sup>163</sup> This is true of several of the works on *Sound Museum*. The classic Coleman “terror” as described in the 1960s is no longer there, neither is the constant improvised counterpoint of Coleman’s electric ensemble from the recording made in the 1970s. In comparison, Allen’s chord based structures are a new interpretation of this type of music. Rather than utilizing melodic ideas, she instead uses the piano almost percussively in the composed sections, reinforcing the waltz like rhythm with stricter regularity than any of Coleman’s previous associates. And her improvised sections frequently make use of harmonic “planing,” or moving lines of chords in parallel motion, recalling Coleman’s harmolodic approach to chords and melodic lines.

After *Sound Museum* Coleman’s groups and projects became numerous, but it seemed that little was changing with his compositional style. For the most part, the bands remained small; a duo recording with Joachim Kuhn, and various quartet performances. Larger ensembles were occasionally used at large festivals and Prime Time was partially reinstated for performances with multimedia, dancers, or other types of multidisciplinary or multicultural interaction.

When *Sound Grammar* was released in 2006, it had been almost 10 years since Coleman had made an album under his own name. He was once again composing new material, but had still decided to use one of his oldest pieces, “Turnaround” and a few others as well. Despite it being an

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<sup>163</sup> Versions of these pieces are analyzed in greater detail in the next section.

award winning record, not much had changed in Coleman's harmolodic world on *Sound Grammar*. Rather than the record itself being groundbreaking, the Pulitzer was more of an indication that Coleman's musical language was not so shocking in the new millennium. His reputation as a master musician was cemented.

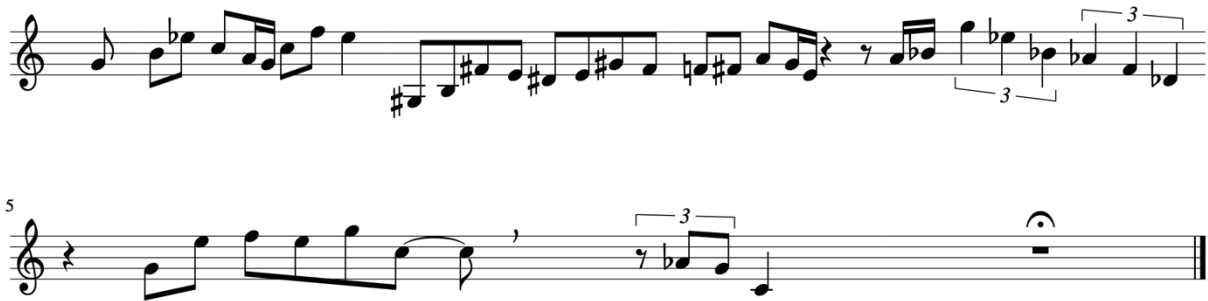
Coleman's work on *Sound Grammar* is not a reinvention but rather a reimagining of the kind of ensemble that he had employed in the 1960s with his trio. The quartet includes two bassists which leave little territory unexplored in terms of technique or instrumental timbre. The level of intensity and pure joy displayed through the performances is also staggering, and Coleman is more lyrical during this set than on his studio works from the 1990s.

In fact, *Sound Grammar* is probably Coleman's most accessible record, at least in terms of its critical reception and acknowledgement by the musical mainstream. The combination factors including the public awareness of his music at that time, the skill and knowledge of his musicians, and the type of acoustic reexamination that Coleman was involved in, seemed to make it the perfect balance between being looking back, but still coming from inside his own personal tradition of innovation. The performance showcases a slightly tweaked version of his 1960s trio.

But frankly, nothing had really changed, at least from a compositional perspective. The pieces written for *Sound Grammar* are all of typical Coleman architecture, riff-based themes, ballads, modular themes, etc. Figure 18 depicts the theme from "Jordan," the album's opening track. It is clear that Coleman is still utilizing techniques from his old bag of tricks, and the only concrete difference is the instrumentation.

All instruments perform the melody to "Jordan" in unison. Again there is no clear meter. The tempo is fluid and the bass lines consistently create contrapuntal lines to Coleman's improvisations in the solo section. The piece sets the tone for the remainder of the album, in which

the new quartet works its way through the Coleman harmonolodic catalog of themes and their infinite variations and combinations.



**Figure 19: “Jordan” (2005)**

Coleman was now 76 years old and thinking about his legacy. For the first time in his life he had both the respect of the critics and the academy, and the financial support not to be merely thinking about the present moment.

When Coleman speaks about Sound Grammar as a philosophy, he seems to be talking about more than just music. The inside of the CD jacket reads:

Talking is the universal method of words that form the language of people. It is also the creator of thoughts and ideas. Languages identify the position of said birthplace of its citizens. Sound stimulates the newborn baby and could cause the infant to cry. Sound itself is used in endless forms of communication. Sound is neither masculine or feminine yet the worldwide use of it is based on the order of human culture.

Sounds found in the expression of music, vocal and instrumental, are the global styles or forms such as jazz, opera, country, classical and other musical genres, all equal in the concept of ideas. Sound has a specific meaning when used in different dialects. The culture of civilization when expressed in different tongues identifies the differences.

The conclusion is that the Grammar of Sound is universal.<sup>164</sup>

Again, it is nearly impossible to determine what Coleman is on about from the message in the liner notes. At first glance it might seem that Coleman was trying to express a sort of “music is a universal language” kind of philosophy. But Coleman does not specifically point to music, he only uses it as an example of a specific kind of sound. Furthermore, he acknowledges that sounds convey different meanings within individual cultures.

Coleman’s musical philosophy at this point was building towards encompassing all types of sound. Speech rhythms, instruments, static, white noise, sampling and electronic sounds had already been assimilated into the harmolodic catalogue. But since Coleman was not only dealing with sounds associated with music, he needed to give his concepts a new name. Sound Grammar was the harmolodic approach adapted to music, language and all other types of human-created sound.

#### **4.2.3 A More Comprehensive Discussion of Compositional Taxonomy**

After some analysis of Coleman’s works from 1980-2015, it would undoubtedly seem that the Jost/Wilson classification system is in need of greater refinement. While it pinpoints the majority of Coleman’s works, the additions of “riff-hybrid” themes and “non-Coleman melodies” to

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<sup>164</sup> Ornette Coleman, Liner notes to *Sound Grammar*, Phrase Text Inc. 2006

Coleman's compositional arsenal, as briefly explained in section 4.2.1, entail the creation of at least one additional category and one sub-category.

Furthermore, neither Jost or Wilson discusses Coleman's "freely improvised" pieces as a compositional form. This is probably because these works are not "composed" in a traditional European sense. But because of their status as recorded artifacts in Coleman's catalog, and because these pieces also *do* have some formal compositional structure and influence in terms of instrumentation, direction, solo order, and the occasional addition of lyrics or poetry, they should not be excluded from the table. Other musicians and scholars, notably Ekkhard Jost, Joachim Berendt, and C. Michael Bailey, have asserted that even in Coleman's most notorious, "freely improvised" piece, "Free Jazz," there are obvious signs of previously agreed upon motivic and rhythmic choices. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the taxonomy of Coleman compositions created through the efforts of Jost and Wilson and a newly revised version of that categorical system.

This extension is necessary to account for music that Ornette Coleman recorded after 1980. Two categories are added: "Harmolodic Reinventions" (Coleman interpretations of music by other composers or reinvented themes from his own previous ensembles) and "Free Group Improvisations," methods of musical creation that had been left out by other scholars. Furthermore, the category of "Combinations of A and B" has been broken down into subsets based upon whether a particular piece is a clear utilization of a "bebop" styled melody, or a "riff" derived one. The examples provided can give the listener a clear understanding of each specific group, or subgroup. A comprehensive discussion of these compositional categories and their sub-groups is provided below.

Wilson's Revised Classification System for Coleman Compositions				
A. Bebop Derived	B. Coleman Themes			C. Combinations of A and B
"Bird Food" (1961)	B1 Rubato Themes	B2 Modular Themes	B3 Endless Riffs	"Congeniality" (1960)
	"Lonely Woman" (1959)	"Mind and Time" (1959)	"Dancing In Your Head" (1973)	

**Table 2: Jost/Wilson Classification System.**



Type of Composition	Sub-Category	Examples
<b>A. Bebop Derived Themes</b>	N/A	"Bird Food" "Chippie" "Jayne"
<b>B. Coleman Themes</b>	B1. Ballads	"Lonely Woman" "What Reason"
	B2. Modular	"Check-Out Time" "Macho Woman" "Mothers of the Veil"
	B3. Riff Based	"Theme From a Symphony" "City Living"
<b>C. Combinations (A and B)</b>	C1. Bebop Hybrid	"Congeniality"
	C2. Riff Hybrid	"Police People" "3 Wishes" "School Work"
<b>D. Harmolodic Reinventions</b>	N/A	"Mary Hartman" "Bach Prelude" "Sonny Moon for Two"
<b>E. Free Group Improvisations</b>	E1. Lyric	"Science Fiction"
	E2. Instrumental	"Free Jazz"

**Table 3: Revised Classification of Coleman Compositions**

### **A. Bebop Derived Themes**

As discovered by both Jost and Wilson, Group A is perhaps the earliest known type of Coleman composition. Several pieces from every period in Coleman's career fit this description however, as Coleman had began experimenting with the bebop language as a young saxophonist but lacked the guidance of a mentor or teacher he created his own reconstructions of the bebop vocabulary resulting in phrases and harmonies that "didn't make any sense" according to Gunther Schuller or other well-versed jazz musicians.

The category of "bebop derived themes" can be simply described as: solely composed of melodic lines that sound like they could be part of a bebop melody or solo, but do not conform to the typical phraseology (4, 8, 16, etc. bar sections), or utilize typical harmonic (ii-V7-I, iii-vi-ii-V, "rhythm changes," etc.) progressions.

Examples of these pieces include the previously examined "Bird Food" in section 4.1.1, as well as "Chippie" and "Jayne," as well as many other pieces from Coleman's early records. In fact, the Coleman compositions analyzed by most scholars are almost all from the late 1950s and early 1960s, as are the compositions chosen for analysis by Jost and Wilson. Since Coleman never really abandoned this device however, a later example is depicted in the form of "Word from Bird" (1985). (See Figure 20) Trademark characteristics of its typography are highlighted.

It is immediately apparent when looking at the transcribed theme of "Word from Bird" that the phrase lengths are also irregular. While the form is eight bars in length, Coleman does not phrase his melodic lines as two even groupings of four bars (as would be typical) or even four

groupings of two bars. He instead opts to write the melody as a three bar phrase, followed by a two bar phrase, and then returns to another three bar phrase.

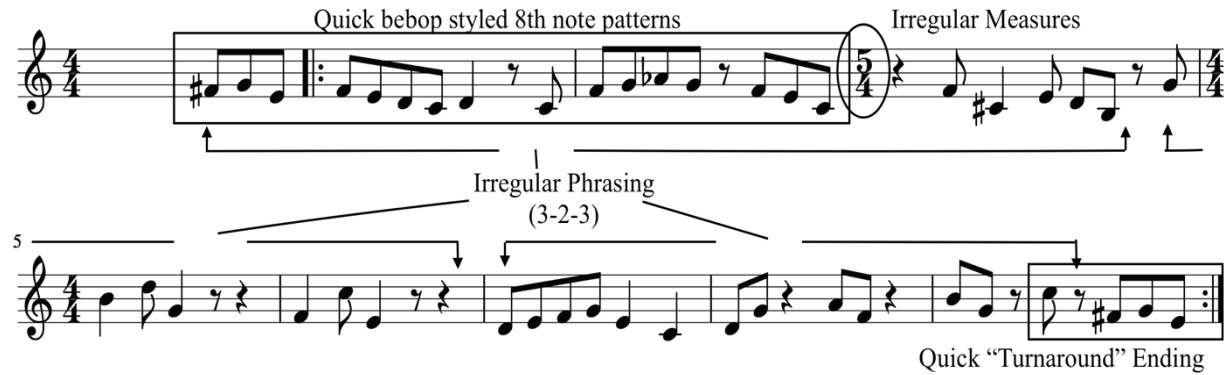


Figure 20: “Word from Bird” (1985)

## B. Coleman Themes

The second type of Coleman composition according to Wilson (the only other type according to Jost’s model) is the “Coleman Theme.” A Coleman theme is simply an original composition that does not contain elements of the bebop language, or does not draw on it as the predominant characteristic in its melodic content. Instead, Coleman Themes are completely independent of any school of thought occurring in the jazz world at the same time. They are a unique structure that is not dependent upon any previous knowledge of the jazz language. Coleman Themes are divided into three distinct groups in the taxonomy: Coleman Ballads, Modular Themes, and Riff Based Themes.

## **1. Ballads<sup>165</sup>**

Coleman ballads are defined by their slow moving melodic figures which are often in stark contrast to the energetic nature of the drummer. The themes often tend to “glide” over the top of what is usually a clear beat pattern, but can sometimes be only a suggestion of a beat. Because of this contrast, Coleman ballads often have an ambiguous and fluid time signature; meter is often unclear and can be only be sketched out based on the individual phrase lengths. “Lonely Woman” (1959) (transcribed in section 4.1.1, Figure 4) is a clear example of this type of composition. Other examples include “Lorraine” (1958), and “Broken Shadows” (1971). These ballad types of compositions can have even more erratic phrase lengths and meter variations than the previously explained bebop themes.

## **2. Modular Themes**

Modular themes are compositions in which Coleman creates a melodic idea and then expands based upon its rhythmic or harmonic structure. Frequently these ideas move through different key areas as is the case with “Check-Out Time” (1968) “Latin Genetics” (1987), and “Mothers of the Veil” (1987). but that does not always occur. Sometimes Coleman will merely move a melodic line up or down by a third while remaining in the original key, creating a melodic sequence. The modulating theme of “Mothers of the Veil” is transcribed in Figure 21.

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<sup>165</sup> Wilson refers to these first as “Rubato Themes” but then changes to calling them “Coleman Ballads” in a later sentence. For this work, “Coleman Ballads” is the more descriptive term.

As can be clearly seen, the melodic line shifts up and down by step, first from A<sup>b</sup> to G<sup>b</sup>, then from D<sup>b</sup> to B. Haden's bass lines pedal on the dominant of each change, giving the line the feel of a suspended pentatonic progression. When the theme is then developed in the B section, Haden maintains a pedal point on the tonic, while the other instruments continue to modulate keys through modes of A<sup>b</sup> Major. This could be part of what Coleman means by "modulation without changing keys." Haden's bass always reinforces the tonic, but the band as a whole creates new modal sonorities.

While some modular pieces are developed over two or more sections, others are only slightly modified riff compositions cycling through diatonic chord changes. Examples of this approach include pieces based in modified blues changes like "Turnaround" (1958), and "Broadway Blues" (1962). Others variations like "Latin Genetics" (1987) hover around even simpler progressions like I-V-I or I-V-IV-I.

**A**  $A\flat\text{Maj}7/E\flat$   $G\flat\text{Maj}7/D\flat$

$A\flat\text{Maj}7/E\flat$   $G\flat\text{Maj}7/D\flat$   $D\flat\text{Maj}7/A\flat$

$B\text{Maj}7/F\sharp$   $D\flat\text{Maj}7/A\flat$   $B\text{Maj}7/F\sharp$

**B**  $A\flat\text{Maj}7/F$   $F-7$   $A\flat 6/F$

$F-7$

$D\flat\text{Maj}7/F$   $F-7$

Figure 21: “Mothers of the Veil” with implied harmonies.

### 3. Riff Based Themes

Riff based compositions became a staple of Coleman’s musical vocabulary after 1973 due to the Jajouka influences. These types of pieces are simple repetitions of a motive or “riff” that repeats an arbitrary number of times until Coleman cues a short bridge or B section. The A material then returns for an extended length of time and is performed for a different (again seemingly arbitrary) number of repetitions before an improvisatory section is begun.

Yet while Coleman is repeating the A material, the rest of the band improvises around his lines, creating new harmonies and contrapuntal lines for each recapitulation. “Theme from a Symphony,” and “City Living” (depicted in Figure 22 with annotations) are both examples of this type of compositional practice.

Repetitive, Riff-based A section

A Ad. Lib. (number of times)

3

B On Cue. No Meter. All Instruments Unison

Disruptive, non-metric B material

6

D.C. Last x Fine

Figure 22: “City Living” as recorded in 1985 with annotations.

## C. Combinations of A and B

Coleman also frequently combines elements of the first two categories most commonly in the form of Bebop Hybrids and Riff Based Hybrids. Various elements of Coleman Themes are also commonly used within the same piece as Coleman will sometimes modulate a specific riff, passing it through various tonal centers.

### 1. Bebop Hybrids

These are themes in which Coleman mixes his bebop inspired melodies with his more characteristic style ballad pieces. Jost described the piece “Congeniality” as being a perfect archetype of a “free jazz theme.”<sup>166</sup> Other examples include “Peace” (1959), the melody of which is transcribed and annotated in Figure 23.

One can clearly see how the swung, bebop style passages are contrasted with slow moving quarter note triplet figures. The piece’s inconsistent phrase lengths are indicative of Coleman’s bebop inspired style, and sections of ambiguous time are present as well. Rather than continuing with two bar phases, Coleman opts to move between one, and two, bar ideas broken up with pauses.

The ideas are related to each other and in the same key area. But by moving between straight and swung eights, combined with the deliberate shift from quarter and half note pulses of

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<sup>166</sup> Jost, *Free Jazz*, 77.



the meter in the triplet sections, which all instruments play in unison, Coleman gives the piece a characteristic sense of uncertainty.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Peace" in 4/4 time, featuring annotations for stylistic analysis. The score is divided into three systems. The first system, labeled "Swung 8ths in a bebop style", shows a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet. The second system, labeled "Slow moving, contrasting phrase", shows a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet, with a box highlighting a section and a label "Straight 8ths" pointing to it. The third system, labeled "Stylistic transition", shows a melodic line with eighth notes and a triplet, with a box highlighting a section and a label "Straight 8ths" pointing to it. The score includes various musical notations such as treble clef, key signature of two flats, and time signature of 4/4.

Figure 23: “Peace” as recorded in 1959 with annotations.

## 2. Riff Hybrids

Riff Hybrids are a further refined sub-category beyond the analytical models presented by Jost and Wilson. As described briefly in section 4.2.1, these pieces utilize riff melodies which repeat a fixed number of times. These also contrast with other melodic material which can be in a ballad, or bebop style. “Police People,” (annotated in Figure 24), shows the construction of a riff and its variation (A and A’) punctuated by statements of a bebop style melodic phrase (B).

The musical score for "Police People" is presented in four staves, each containing a measure number in the left margin. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The first staff (measures 1-4) is labeled 'A' and contains a riff. The second staff (measures 5-8) is labeled 'B' and contains a variation of the riff. The third staff (measures 9-12) is labeled 'A'' and contains a bebop-inspired phrase. The fourth staff (measures 13-16) is labeled 'B' and contains four repetitions of a riff variation. Annotations include: 'Riff A Modulating Down by Step Diatonically' with an arrow pointing from measure 2 to measure 4; 'Bebop Inspired Phrase' with an arrow pointing to measure 10; and '4 Repetitions of a Riff A Variation' with an arrow pointing to measures 13-16.

Figure 24: “Police People” as recorded in 1985 with annotations.

In “Police People,” Coleman merges bebop phrasing with simpler riffs, i.e. a melody based on arpeggiated chords moving it down by step; the riff is interrupted before its arrival at the tonic (D Major) through the utilization of a bebop phrase. He then returns to a variation on the original melody, repeating it four times, before concluding with the B material once more.

Riff Hybrid compositions can also draw on a multitude of slightly varying melodic phrases. Except for the stepwise motion of the last note in the “B” section, “Peace Warriors” (See Figure 25) could be said to use three distinct riffs as the basis of its form. Yet the motion of the melodic line in the “B” section can be identified as a bebop cliché, a common melodic line employed by several other soloists.

The image displays a musical score for the song "Peace Warriors" in 4/4 time, with three distinct sections labeled A, B, and C. Section A, labeled "Riff 1 (Implied Key of A Major)", consists of a single line of music starting with a double bar line and a key signature of one sharp (F#), followed by a melodic sequence of eighth and quarter notes. Section B, labeled "Riff 2 (C#)", is an 8-measure phrase. The first four measures are on a staff with one sharp (F#), and the last four measures are on a staff with two sharps (F# and C#). A double-headed vertical arrow connects the final note of the first four measures (F#) to the first note of the last four measures (C#), with the text "Rising diatonically by step" written above it. Section C, labeled "Riff 3 (G)", is a 10-measure phrase. The first six measures are on a staff with one sharp (F#), and the last four measures are on a staff with no sharps or flats (C major). A double-headed vertical arrow connects the final note of the first six measures (F#) to the first note of the last four measures (G), with the text "Modulation down by half-step" written above it. The last four measures of Section C are enclosed in a rectangular box.

Figure 25: “Peace Warriors” as recorded in 1987 with annotations

Unlike “Police People,” “Peace Warriors” modulates away from the original key, first by third (A to C<sup>#</sup>), then by tritone (C<sup>#</sup> to G), and finally by half-step (G to G<sup>b</sup>). Each melodic repetition in the “B” section is slightly varied, as the last note of the line always rises by diatonic step. These variables allow the piece to avoid falling into monotony or cliché and also allow for a leading tone into the next phrase as the melodic line then moves from F<sup>#</sup> to G, creating a better sense of continuity. It also reveals an augmented version of the second riff (C<sup>#</sup>, E<sup>#</sup>, F<sup>#</sup>, G)

Riff hybrid compositions can also be created when a riff is transposed up or down by a specific interval within a given key area as in “3 Wishes” (See Figure 26.)

“3 Wishes” is a combination of a modular theme and a riff based theme. In this case, Coleman moves the “A” material diatonically (in Fmin or Fmin<sup>Δ</sup>7) in order to create separate sections. While “A” is played an arbitrarily variable number of times, (4x on the first statement, 7x on the second, 3x on the third, etc.) A’ is always played three times, giving the work some added structure. To support this, Coleman also does not vary, or “ad-lib” the ending of the A’ material. The B section is still used to interrupt the redundancy of the repetitive motive, but only after the riff modulates and then recapitulates with another arbitrary number of statements.

A

Variable number of repetitions

4x/7x/3x

1.

“A” Riff and additional variations

2.

3. (4. 5. 6. 7.)

Last X to Coda (After B)

A'

Fixed number of repetitions

3x

D.C.

A' Material = “A”

B

Modulated Diatonically

Fine

Figure 26: “3 Wishes” as recorded in 1988 with annotations.

#### D. Harmolodic Reinventions

The fourth category of Coleman compositions refers to Coleman's arrangements of the music of other composers. Examples include "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" (1978), "Bach Prelude" (1995), and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (1996). In these cases, Coleman not only changes the stylistic traits of the pieces but the ensembles by which they are performed. A symphonic TV theme becomes a duet, and a solo prelude for cello is arranged for a seven-piece, electric, improvising ensemble. In other words, the context is morphed along with the style of the piece.

The theme from the TV show "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" (See Figure 27) is one example of a piece that has been "Colmanized." In just the introductory phrase, it becomes immediately apparent that the simple 4/4 time of the original work is absent. The entire piece is instead performed as a Coleman Ballad with no clear sense of meter in the introduction or any statements of the theme.

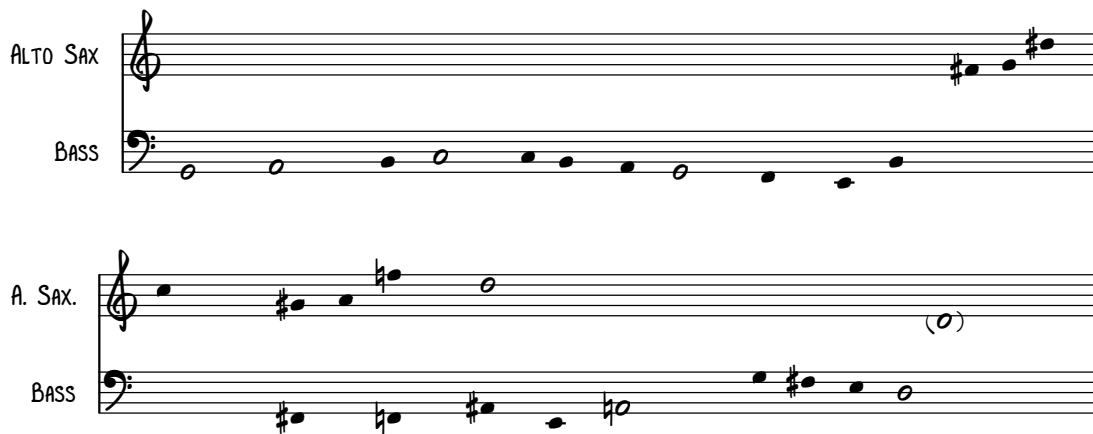


Figure 27: The introduction to "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman." (1978) Longs and shorts approximated.

While the bass plays the main line in a rubato style, Coleman sequences a small motive up by step. This is a mimic of the actress's voice at the beginning of the soap opera. In just one short passage Coleman has removed the meter of the tune, employed harmolodic modulation, and broken the previously established phrase structure.

This category can also refer to the repeated manipulation of previous Coleman themes to meet whatever suits his current musical philosophy at the time of the recording. Coleman's covers of his own music at different points in his career often contain varied elements of his own harmolodic theory. "European Echoes" is an excellent example of this phenomenon. This theme has been recorded three times in Coleman's career, first by his trio in 1967, then Prime Time in 1975, and finally with a newly formed, more traditional quartet in 1996. The theme from the original recording at the Golden Circle is shown in figure 28.

When listening to the original version of this piece a certain whimsicality is invoked by its childlike, sing-song nature. The piece almost seems like a nursery rhyme or an Irish folk melody with its waltzing character.

But in 1975 Coleman's Prime Time version of the piece turns it into a jagged, off-kilter, 3/4, funk tune. The overall form is shortened and the "B" section is abandoned in favor of a new, more ad-lib styled one. By 1975, "European Echoes" (See Figure 29) was more of a riff based composition than it had when it was initially composed, with the "A" section repeating multiple times and the newly created "B" material used as a brief interlude. This is in line with Coleman's more Jajouka inspired philosophy at that time, which focused more on riffing as a melodic and harmonic device.



Figure 28: “European Echoes” as recorded in 1967.

**A** Straight ♩ = 188

**B** Freely ♩ = 144

Figure 29: “European Echoes” as played by Prime Time

This version of “European Echoes” also uses a technique common to both Coleman’s music and that of the Master Musicians of Jajouka, abrupt tempo changes. The tempo of the piece suddenly switches from 188 to 144, a drastic difference. Additionally, the “B” section seems to have more of a 6/8 feel than the opening theme due to the strong triplet feel played by the drummer, and likely could be re-barred as such.

The final recorded version of “European Echoes” reflects Coleman’s stylistic refinement over the next two decades. On *Sound Museum*, Coleman has completely removed the “B” section of the piece in favor of simplicity. The work never moves beyond the sing-song waltz theme except when the group begins to improvise. The melody has also returned to a state more in line with the original recording except that Coleman is now more consistent with where he places the eighth note variation of the riff. (Figure 30).

The image shows a musical score for the piece "European Echoes". It consists of two staves. The top staff is in 3/4 time and contains a melody with several annotations. A box labeled 'A' is at the beginning. An arrow points to a circled '7x' with the text 'Swing ♩ = 160'. Another arrow points to a later part of the melody with the text 'Consistent # of Repetitions'. A box around a specific melodic phrase is labeled 'Melodic Cue for Next Section'. The staff ends with the text 'To Coda on Out Head'. The bottom staff is in 6/8 time and contains a different melody. An arrow points from the top staff to this one with the text 'Contrasting rhythmic styles'. The first part of the bottom staff is labeled 'Straight 8ths'. The staff ends with a double bar line and repeat dots, followed by the text 'Fade out'.

Figure 30: “European Echoes” as recorded in 1996 with annotations.



By this point “European Echoes” had reached a greater level of refinement. These changes were likely to do with some of Coleman’s evolving tactics, but also an informed decision based on the band that he was currently working with. Since Allen and Moffett had both been working with Coleman for less than a year at the time of the recording, it is possible that he had modified the form of his compositions to give the new band members a chance to adapt to his style and to make the recordings happen more smoothly. Things like consistent numbers of riff repetitions and sonic cues in the melody are more present than in previous records. Coleman had learned from experience that there was a learning curve associated with performing harmolodically. If he was not working with Prime Time, he would need to give the new bands clearer directions.

#### **E. Free Group Improvisations**

Like the two previous groups, Free Group Improvisations are also excluded from the Jost/Wilson taxonomy of Coleman compositions. This is likely because they are supposedly without form. The musicians allegedly determine the shape and style of the piece purely through group improvisations. It is important to mention here that nearly all Coleman pieces contain areas of non-composed and undirected group improvisation. But some recordings like “Free Jazz” (1960) are nearly completely created out of this kind of spontaneous performance.

But “free improvisation” is something of a misnomer. Coleman’s works nearly always contain some semblance of a previously agreed upon substructure. Even if the goal of the work is to create something unique and spur-of-the-moment, there are clear moments where the ensembles have been coached rhythmically or are given an initial idea from which to build. Coleman also

creates consistency and cohesiveness in such “free improvisations” through the use of other devices. Free Group Improvisations present themselves in two ways on Coleman’s recordings.

## **1. Lyric**

This category of improvised pieces refers to works that are freely improvised in terms of their instrumental content but where Coleman utilizes a poem, rap or other vocal device in order to create cohesion in the recording. By inserting these lyrics and vocal passages Coleman gives the listener a sense of unity within the ensemble. Examples of this technique include “Science Fiction” (1971), and “Search for Life” (1995).

Of these examples, “Science Fiction” is obviously the more chaotic, while “Search for Life” establishes a clear meter through both the drum and bass groove and omnipresent rhythmic sampling. But even in “Search for Life” the saxophone and guitar lines are clearly improvised throughout. There are no indications of composed melodic lines or “hooks” as would be typical of a R&B styled piece. Furthermore, Coleman’s own horn lines are also overdubbed on top of one another, giving a sense of improvised counterpoint.

Any type of form in “Science Fiction” is not immediately clear upon listening. But after careful examination it can be determined that Coleman does predetermine some aspects of the piece’s character. First of all, it is highly unlikely that Coleman asked poet David Henderson<sup>167</sup> to

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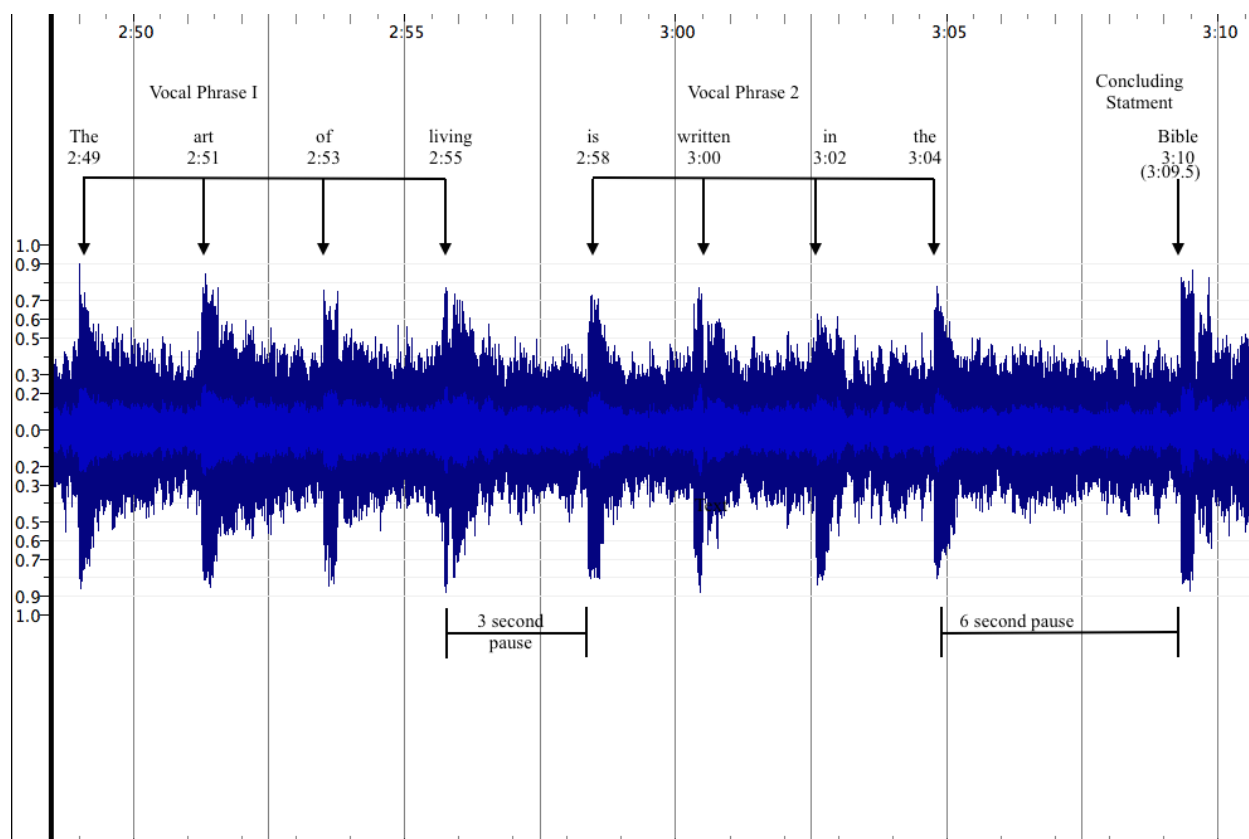
<sup>167</sup> Henderson was a prominent participant in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. He routinely used jazz artists like Thelonius Monk and John Coltrane as subjects of his writings. Henderson also composed lyrics to pieces by Sun Ra, Lawrence “Butch” Morris, and David Murray.

recite a piece that would be completely improvised. The poem was written with the occasion in mind but agreed upon previously by both Henderson and Coleman.

How Henderson spaces his words in “Science Fiction” is a stark element of continuity in an otherwise chaotic, sonic environment. While the ensemble rages in collective improvisation underneath, Henderson’s words repeat at almost completely regular intervals. The annotated waveform (See Figure 31) illustrates this phenomenon. Henderson also groups the poem’s words into a short verse (approximately 7 words) and a long verse (approximately 9 words).

As shown, Henderson’s long verses form two distinct vocal phrases which are left open until he arrives at the conclusive statement or word. His words are consistently spaced by a specific number of seconds, sometimes three, other times only two. He is too consistent with his spacing within these individual verses for the recitation to be at random. The diagram clearly shows that the first group of four words is followed by a slightly longer pause before the statement begins a concluding phrase. That pause is then approximately doubled before Henderson utters the final word.

Shorter verses (six words) do not use longer pauses between their halves and are instead punctuated with samples of a crying baby. Henderson’s nine word verses (like the one in figure 27) are followed by a long pause, where the collective improvisation is turned up in the overall studio mix. A complete sketch of the form of “Science Fiction” is depicted in Figure 32.



**Figure 31: Waveform diagram of “Science Fiction” starting at 2:48.5 with annotations. Written timings of spoken words are rounded to the nearest second.**

The form of “Science Fiction” is clearly defined by the vocal phrases as shown in figure 32. Henderson’s verses make an observable pattern which gives the collective improvisation underneath a hint of a formal structure. Short verses are always punctuated by the crying baby sample. Longer verses are divided into two phrases and then followed by an instrumental section. The total form is repeated three times in its entirety with the ending falling after a short verse, but before the sample is played again.

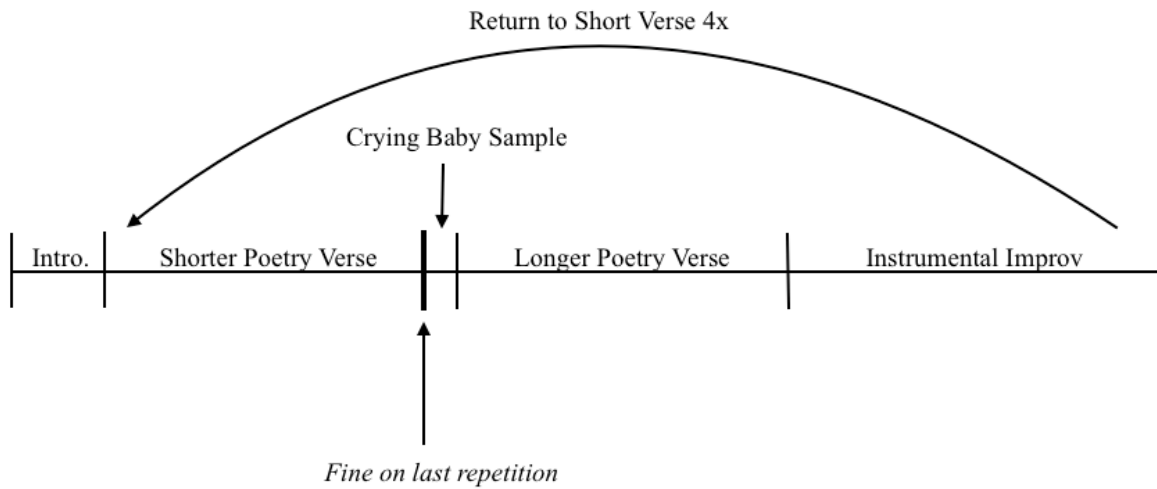


Figure 32: Sketch of the form of “Science Fiction.”

## 2. Instrumental

Coleman’s most notorious pieces are usually his “free improvisations.” This typography started in 1960 with the now somewhat infamous *Free Jazz* record. But even *Free Jazz* is not completely devoid of previously agreed upon ideas of rhythm and structure. For instance, the wind instruments begin with a series of fanfares which despite their harsh dissonance, are in rhythmic unison. They also close the work with the same rhythmic fanfares. One might argue that these statements are improvised, but given the speed at which the wind instruments abandon their clashing, introductory improvised ideas, it is unlikely that they are not at least cued by Coleman in some fashion.

The fanfares give the work structure and continuity, as do several instances of melodic backgrounds which are played in unison underneath the soloists. Even if all of these motivic ideas are improvised, they are suggestive of an underlying form or outline.

Although the length of the solos seems to exhaust the listener's capacity for concentration (Coleman's solo alone is just over ten minutes) the participants take turns soloing in a typical bebop fashion. The soloing order is: Dolphy, Hubbard, Coleman, Cherry, Haden, and finally Higgins. The group has adhered to some traditional ideas so strictly that it still incorporates the same kind of order as most of the hard bop recordings of the same period: wind instruments first, and then rhythm section. This was an instrumental hierarchy that Coleman would seek to remove from his music in later years, but during the 1960s he had not developed his harmolodic identity enough to get away from what was then considered to be the proper practice of the jazz idiom. Later, unrecorded performances using a collectivist, improvisatory approach (such as Coleman's work with Joachim Kühn) were more independent of this model. But at this stage, some kind of formal structure is always present. Guidelines are a common characteristic of Coleman's compositional methodology, regardless of how loosely defined they are.

#### **4.2.3 Coleman's Compositions as Jazz Standards**

Although these performances of Coleman's pieces must be mentioned in order to grasp the breadth of his creative influence, this section is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the ways in which artists have interpreted Coleman's pieces over the last half century. Instead, this brief discussion is provided to supplement the previous descriptions of the harmolodic theory and

to highlight the ways in which some of the other performers in Coleman's creative circles have created their own interpretations of his pieces to refine the theory in their own respective ways. The topic of avant-garde canon formation is a subject worthy of more serious study.

Because of Coleman's influence over the past 35 years, several of his compositions have become standards and have been recorded repeatedly by various artists from both within and outside the jazz tradition.<sup>168</sup> Although this phenomenon has mostly taken place in the later half of Coleman's career, some of his pieces have been finding popularity since the very beginning. "Lonely Woman" for example, was being performed by the Modern Jazz Quartet as early as 1962, largely due to the influence of John Lewis who was probably Coleman's most prominent supporter during the early years and an admirer of his compositions. It is likely that his regard for Coleman's music was partially responsible for its initial rise in popularity as well as the music being taken seriously by other jazz musicians. "Lonely Woman" made a few other notable appearances before 1980 (on recordings by Lester Bowie, Marzette Watts, and Old and New Dreams), but like most of Coleman's music, was covered with greater frequency in the decades to follow. Vocal versions of the piece were also created beginning in the 1960s with lyrics written by Margo Guryan.<sup>169</sup>

Even though "Lonely Woman" has been Coleman's most popular composition, several other pieces from the early period have become standards as well. "The Sphinx," "Peace," "Turnaround," "When Will the Blues Leave," and "The Blessing" (all originally issued between 1957 and 1960) have also been recorded and performed on several occasions. Later compositions like "Law Years," "All My Life," and "Street Woman," have also found a high degree of popularity

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<sup>169</sup> Chris Conner, *Free Spirits: Collectibles*, 1962.

among younger generations of jazz musicians and are occasionally performed by mainstream jazz artists like Joe Lovano.

Whenever Coleman's compositions are performed it is clear that artists favor the music of his earlier, acoustic ensembles. One notable exception is John Zorn, whose 1989 record, *Spy vs. Spy* which includes compositions from both the acoustic and electric periods. Other complete Coleman tribute records have been made but with varying degrees of success. Zorn's interpretation seems to be one of the longest lasting and most highly regarded among both fans and critics.

Some interesting questions arise when one considers the interpretations of Coleman's compositions. How well did these musicians know Coleman's unique musical philosophy? Furthermore, is it necessary to understand harmolodics (at least to a small degree) in order to create a reproduction or reinterpretation of his work?

If one assumes that direct contact with the philosophy via performances with Coleman is the greatest indication, the recreations by those who have performed with Coleman should display the largest number of harmolodic principles. For example, the interpretations made by Old and New Dreams (Blackwell, Cherry, Haden, and Redman) should have more harmolodic tendencies than those by David Murray, or Dave Liebman.

But the covers of Coleman's work by Old and New Dreams are not noticeably more or less harmolodic than other recreations, nor are they strictly faithful to the original recordings. The Old and New Dreams recording of "Happy House" for instance is played with a much more established sense of 4/4 time than the original recording. As shown in Figure 33, the wind instruments rest while drums play clearly defined one, two or three bar interludes between melodic fragments. The tempo is also consistent for longer periods of time. Similar changes are also made by Old and New Dreams to a number of other works, including "Broken Shadows" and "Civilization Day." The



group of Coleman alumni may have been simplifying the pieces to make them more accessible to a wider jazz audience. If this was indeed the case, the efforts were successful as Old and New Dreams outsold their former mentor during the 10 years that they remained a band.

Recordings of Coleman pieces from the same period by other musicians display their own unique variances from the original recordings. Coleman's tunes seem to have individuality build into their very foundation. Even the first record to bear his name, *Something Else*, indicates in its liner notes that Coleman envisioned his compositions evolving with the passage of time and changing according to the whims of other musicians. In terms of simply the harmony, he wrote: "On this recording, the [chord] changes finally decided on for the tunes are a combination of some I suggested and some the musicians suggested. If you feel the lines different one day, you can change the harmony accordingly"<sup>170</sup> This indicates that even early on, Coleman knew that other artists would not only feel his melodic lines and harmonies differently, but would reinterpret them and change them at will.

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<sup>170</sup> Ornette Coleman. *Something Else!* 3551. 1958.

Figure 33: The theme from “Happy House” as played by Old and New Dreams (Chord changes are implied.)

While *Old and New Dreams* took a more conservative approach, other innovators pushed Coleman's experimentations to greater lengths. For instance, Lester Bowie's interpretation of "Lonely Woman" does not contain any sections of clearly defined tempo and often strays from the original melody. Artists like Bowie, Haden, Redman and others were choosing between performance of the composition according to the composer's original idea, and performance in regard to the "spirit" of the composition, or striking a balance between the two.

Coincidentally, this is what makes the Zorn recording one of the most interesting. Zorn's take on Coleman's pieces is unique; whereas most artists attempt to slow the initial tempos in order to create more clarity in the melodic lines, Zorn's interpretations increase the tempos, some almost to the limits of playability. Coleman's music was very inspirational for Zorn and he talked about attempting to capture the feeling of Coleman's sound rather than striving for a more conventional reproduction.

Ornette's music was really [an] inspiration from when I first started playing the saxophone. I'd been playing his tunes and practicing them at home for a long time, 15 years. Eventually, over time, through different interests I just moved further and further away from that kind of straight-ahead, or what you might say straight-ahead [or] free-bop interpretation of Ornette's stuff [and] towards something that's a little more abrasive, a little more shocking, something that I think is a little more akin to the way people first experienced Ornette back in the late 50s because it really was a shock. I think there's going to be a lot of people that hear [our Ornette project] and say the same thing, like "What the fuck are these guys doing? This is an insult!" But we really love Ornette's music and we feel like we're paying tribute to it.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> "John Zorn documentary part 2," YouTube video, Posted by Doublemain, 2/21/2008. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqkm3jpw768](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqkm3jpw768)

Zorn is more interested in recapturing the spirit of Coleman's music than other artists may have been. His interpretations of the music on *Spy vs. Spy* are indeed shocking and experiencing them live might trigger a similar emotional response as Coleman's initial appearances at the Five Spot. But perhaps the most important point that Zorn is making is that Coleman's early music no longer captured that innovative spirit because 30 years had passed since its debut and listeners had spent enough time with the compositions to understand them fully, or at least to the point where they were no longer outrageous. By injecting his own characteristic aggression into the pieces, Zorn is once again imbuing the works with the same level of shock value that they had originally possessed.

In this regard Zorn might be considered the most sensitive to the harmolodic theory. His understanding of Coleman's works as containing a characteristic mood and shock value is arguably more faithful to the philosophy. Zorn's own music often borrows elements of several styles and artists, and pieces them together in an exciting, post-modernist approach, a technique that would sometimes enrage other composers, just as Coleman's piecemeal, pseudo-bebop language infuriated large numbers of jazz musicians in the 1950s.

It is uncanny that just as Coleman was reinventing himself with *Prime Time*, Zorn was recapturing the feel and the adventure of classic Coleman pieces on his own terms, even going so far as to use two drummers—an instrumentation often featured in Coleman's electric music—in his attempts at an artistic remodel.

After 1990 interpretations of Coleman's music were gaining popularity among jazz artists.<sup>172</sup> Joshua Redman performed "Turnaround" on his album *Wish* in a very simple blues style that was mostly faithful to the original recording. The choice was likely due to the inclusion of three members of previous Coleman ensembles, Haden, Higgins, and Metheny as the album's rhythm section but possibly also through the influence of his father Dewey, who was a Coleman alumnus as well. Redman frequently performed Coleman's pieces during his appearances with Metheny throughout the 1990s.

Redman's live versions of Coleman's pieces follow a more traditional, free-bop interpretation. However, his recording of "Lonely Woman" from the album *Momentum* is unique. The recording in question again tries to recapture the original feel of the composition, but this time through the incorporation of the new, freely-available technology of the late 1990s. It brings the piece up to date with digital effects, ambient electronic textures, and synthesized electronic instruments.

Redman's revamping of "Lonely Woman" brought one of Coleman's oldest and most famous pieces up to the current creative space of modern jazz, not only showcasing its versatility but also catching it up to the same place as some of the Coleman compositions being performed contemporarily. Although the Redman recording lacks the shock element pursued in Zorn's work and a degree of spontaneity is lost from the original Coleman presentation, it nevertheless reflects both a personal vision and the direction of popular jazz during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

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<sup>172</sup> Wilson, *Onette Coleman*, 144.

The Redman recording also likely exposed Colman's work to yet another generation of improvisers who were now listening to his music at a time when soul/funk jazz and neo-bop were the trending musical movements. Later electronic interpretations of "Lonely Woman," like those by BB Band (2006), and Hanne Boel (2011) are highly influenced by this post-modernist approach and borrow elements of Redman's style.

One of the reasons for Coleman's continued relevance has been the creation of these reinterpretations of his work. While Coleman himself never really stopped making music, his creations were often highly experimental in nature and frequently inaccessible. Even in his later career his music was challenging to listeners and even while he was being hailed as a jazz master, numerous music critics, radio hosts, musicians, and television personalities still poked fun at the "unlistenable" quality of his music. But these covers tell a different story. They give a lasting impression of a composer whose works have extreme versatility and staying power.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Coleman's initial appearances at the Five Spot at the end of the 1950s are now part of the jazz narrative. Likewise, the revolution in sound that he played a large part in throughout the next decade had tremendous repercussions on the jazz world from both an artistic and philosophical viewpoint. But Coleman was absent (1963-1965) from the scene precisely when the second generation of avant-gardists, Sam Rivers, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler et al., were beginning to enter the public consciousness. Similarly, Coleman's hiatus from music was timed perfectly with the beginning of John Coltrane's transition from hard bop hero to avant-garde exile. It is likely for these reasons that several sources proclaim Coleman to be the father of free jazz or even the father of the avant-garde in general. Coleman's initial innovations, along with those of his contemporaries like Cecil Taylor, preceded the "new thing" movement of the 1960s, but need to be somewhat contextualized.

However far reaching these early approaches were, it needs to be clarified that musicians from various schools of thought had been toying with the idea of free improvisation for nearly a decade before Coleman made *Something Else!* for Contemporary records. This is most notably found in the work of, Lennie Tristano in his *Intuition* and *Digression*. And Charles Mingus has several pieces that utilize multiple thematic structures. It is unjustifiable to proclaim that Coleman was the sole inventor of free jazz or even the father of the avant-garde, when so many others were also coming to the same artistic place, although arriving from a different direction.

Despite the absurdity of naming Coleman the father of the movement based on whether or not his forays into the avant-garde could be considered the first chronologically, an argument for

giving him that title can be made on the basis of his visibility. Out of the several musicians that were experimenting with freely improvised music during the 1950s, it can be said that none of them attracted the same level of attention as Coleman. Furthermore, Coleman's blues oriented, folksy approach to this concept could be considered to be more accessible than the experiments of Taylor, and more interesting than those of Dolphy, or perhaps even Mingus as their investigations of freely improvised music were more nuanced and their compositions were slower to relinquish the deeply entrenched bebop influence of the period. Coleman's compositions and recordings may have hit a kind of innovative "sweet spot" for many artists and critics. They were not obviously derivative of any other artist of the period, but not so bizarre as to be instantly off-putting for most listeners.

Mingus acknowledged that he held a similar opinion after hearing one of Coleman's recordings played during a radio program. "...the fact remains that his notes and lines are so fresh. So when Symphony Sid [radio DJ] played his record, it made everything else he was playing, even my own record that he played, sound terrible. I'm not saying everybody's going to have to play like Coleman. But they're going to have to stop copying Bird. Nobody can play Bird right yet but him."<sup>173</sup>

In listening to Coleman's music surrounded by a host of other, more bebop-minded improvisers, Mingus had noticed the extent to which Bird's language had pervaded the music of

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<sup>173</sup> Brian Priestly. *Mingus a Critical Biography*. New York: Da Capo, 1982



the time. His own explorations were also largely experimental, but they had not pushed the boundary so far.

At the same time, Coleman's love of music and his generosity, with both his financial resources and his time elevated him to a mentorship role for several young artists in the later half of the 1960s.

Upon his arrival in New York City Coleman had already been working with Haden, Cherry and Higgins on harmolodic concepts. Marion Brown mentioned that Coleman had helped him to procure a saxophone and had encouraged him to write music.<sup>174</sup> John Tchicai was also an admirer, and benefitted from Coleman's friendship despite emulating Coltrane's sound to a greater extent. Alto saxophone players like Jackie McLean, Prince Lasha, and later, Henry Threadgill, Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, were exposed to the perspective of liberating the melodic line of a piece from its underlying harmonic implications. The timbral characteristics of Coleman's music were also explored by Peter Brötzman, Pharaoh Sanders, Albert Ayler, and Evan Parker, many of whom also delved into uncommon tunings.

Coleman's influence was also largely spread second hand in the 1960s through the work of Don Cherry, who performed with several members of the second generation of avant-gardists after Coleman's withdrawal from the music business. Cherry and Tchicai, along with Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon, Don Moore and J.C. Moses recorded under the moniker of the "New York Contemporary Five" in Copenhagen during the fall of 1963. Along with recording dates lead by Albert Ayler, these European albums were partially responsible for jump starting the European

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<sup>174</sup> Wilson, *Ornette Coleman*, 98.

jazz avant-garde movements in Copenhagen, Paris and Stockholm.<sup>175</sup> Coleman himself would be involved later, when his trio performed at the Golden Circle in 1965.

By then Coltrane's influence had expanded exponentially and cast a long shadow over both the free jazz scene and the entirety of the jazz saxophone lineage. However, Coltrane was also highly influenced by Coleman's concepts. He attended many performances of the original quartet's engagement at the Five Spot, and even spent time practicing with Coleman and sharing ideas about music during set breaks. Coltrane had even recorded a selection of Coleman compositions for an album entitled *The Avant-Garde*, in collaboration with Don Cherry in 1960. Coltrane himself acknowledged that Coleman had influenced his understanding of how to escape the confines of typical harmonic progressions.

I'm following his lead. He's done a lot to open my eyes to what can be done... I feel indebted to him, myself. Because, actually, when he came along, I was so far in this thing [Giant Steps style harmonic progressions], I didn't know where I was going to go next. And I don't know if I would have thought about just abandoning the chord system or not. I probably wouldn't have thought of that at all. And he came along doing it, and I heard it, I said, "Well that must be the answer."<sup>176</sup>

In fact, Coleman's largest influence may have been made through his association with John Coltrane. While many of these younger musicians were developing their sounds, Coleman had temporarily taken leave of the music world. And after 1963 Coltrane seemed to truly embrace a new artistic direction.

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<sup>175</sup> Saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, one of the first and most highly regarded members of the European avant-garde, cites Coleman as one of his primary influences.

<sup>176</sup> Quersin, Benoit. "Entretiens: La Passe Dangereuse." *Jazz Magazine*, January 1963: 40.

Coltrane's spirituality and his vision of music as a means to approach a higher level of consciousness stands in opposition to the overall feeling of whimsicality and joy of improvisation presented in most of Coleman's music. But Coleman's ideas about collective improvisation as a medium through which to approach a group consciousness may have informed Coltrane's understanding of the process. Despite planting a seed in Coltrane's mind, the music of the two improvisers lacks a real, concrete connection in terms of style. Similarly, Coltrane's followers, Pharaoh Sanders, Archie Shepp, John Tchicai, and Albert Ayler approached their music with a symbolic cult of intensity, a level one step further than Coleman had taken his explorations.

John Coltrane's prominence had also influenced Coleman's later position. In moving to an avant-garde direction Coltrane had brought with him some respect and admiration from the current jazz establishment. While some were merely confused by this move, others began to wonder if there was something more to the movement, and musicians that performed in such a style were more readily accepted and not immediately dismissed as charlatans. It really comes as no surprise that when Coleman returned from his hiatus in 1965, it was to a greater fanfare than his initial public performances. Coltrane and others had been busy doing the work of changing public perception.<sup>177</sup>

By 1980 Coleman's initial innovations were no longer considered to be controversial in most jazz circles. In fact, Coleman's position seemed to be more of a prestigious one among younger generations of improvisers. Even in the years following the release of *Free Jazz*, a second

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<sup>177</sup> Coltrane was not the only bebop inspired musician to move to an avant-garde direction. Sam Rivers and Miles Davis also began releasing more experimental albums during Coleman's absence.

wave of avant-garde artists had emerged that subscribed to the creative use of melodic, harmonic, and instrumental intensity presented on the recording.

While Coleman's concepts may have been the inspiration that began this movement, it is important to note that he did not record another collective improvisation for several years.

When Coleman finally did reemerge after two years of absence, the avant-garde had become the most inclusive style in the history of the music, delving not only into areas of free tonality and meter, but also dealing with tone rows, graphic notation and the addition of electric and non-western instruments. Incidentally, he was one of the formative stylists for the next generation of improvisers who began to perform in New York City's loft scene in the 1970s; his role in maintaining one of the first jazz lofts and art spaces at Artists House at 131 Prince Street made his contribution to that culture immeasurable. Merely by providing this location, Coleman was able to connect and perform with the younger generation and act as a role model and mentor for several aspiring artists.

Because of his status and the space which he provided, Coleman was able to shape several emerging musicians and school them in the methodology of harmolodics. Performers like, James "Blood" Ulmer, Jamaladeen Tacuma, Ronald Shannon Jackson and Bern Nix were able to channel Coleman's sound into their own refined visions. Much of what has been created by these musicians had its roots in the music produced by Prime Time.

Coleman's influence can also be heard in the music of several performers who were active in New York during the late 1970s, perhaps most noticeably in the works of David Murray, Billy Bang, David S. Ware, Matthew Shipp, Lawrence "Butch" Morris, Steve Coleman, (and through him, later improvisers like Geri Allen and Graham Haynes).

All of these performers have mentioned that they were listening to Coleman's recordings early in their careers and many of them have performed Coleman's compositions on more than one occasion. It was likely the artists of New York's jazz loft movement that had the most to do with the canonization of Coleman compositions and their acceptance into the culture of the music.

This was largely because these musicians, like Coleman, had also felt that they were disassociated from the jazz mainstream. The most popular performers of the early 1970s were jazz-rock fusion artists who were attempting to bridge the gap in listenership and resurrect a vision of jazz as popular music. Miles Davis was performing in rock venues, opening for artists like Carlos Santana at major music festivals, and playing to audiences at stadium sized arenas. Inversely, the loft scene was a largely independent, underground movement.

Concerts were organized in apartments, living rooms, and small clubs. Artists were paid minimally; most needed to work day jobs in addition to creating music. With the emergence of "neo-bop" these artists were again forgotten and neglected by the jazz establishment, while performers who embraced a return to previous styles of jazz were deemed to be more accessible and marketable.

Even in the new millennium several of these musicians are still given little to no recognition, and attempts at creating jazz canons, like the Ken Burns documentary<sup>178</sup>, fail to even mention that there were, in fact, active and innovative jazz artists performing between 1975 and

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<sup>178</sup> The Burns documentary is somewhat sympathetic to Coleman's music. It does however, opt to not let Coleman speak for himself about the music that he had created and was still creating at the time that the film was being made. The documentary is much harsher when it examines the work of other avant-garde artists from the same period. One of the largest criticisms of the work is its failure to mention that there was an active underground jazz scene in the 1970s, and artists were still making new, experimental music.

1980. It is no wonder that these aspiring musicians looked to Coleman, who had similarly been written off in the previous decades, for inspiration.

The free funk direction of Prime Time was highly influential through both its direct impact and through each of its alumni. James Blood Ulmer, Ronald Shannon Jackson and Jamaaladeen Tactuma each went on to developing other ensembles that pushed the same musical boundaries and expanded on the new free improvisation/electric ensemble. At the same time, the classic Coleman sound was being kept alive through the collective effort of some of the 1960s band members.

Blackwell, Cherry, Haden and Redman had founded “Old and New Dreams, which among some original compositions, had dedicated most of their album space to recording Coleman’s pieces. Old and New Dreams not only surpassed Coleman in record sales during the 1970s and early 1980s, but was hired on a few occasions to present master classes at university music departments.<sup>179</sup> This was likely because Coleman was busy dealing with so many personal and professional issues between 1979 and 1983 that it was difficult for anyone to contact him regarding performances or teaching opportunities.

After 1983 Coleman’s increased activity and visibility lead to an even greater period of influence among younger generations of musicians. By this time the original music and even the Prime Time experimentations had been absorbed for a sufficient amount of time by the minds of listeners. When Coleman remerged he was greeted as a jazz icon and a master of the music rather than an eccentric voice. Much of the credit for this upgrade in image can be attributed to the later

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<sup>179</sup> A recording of a master class with Haden, Cherry and Redman at Harvard University is available on YouTube. All three of the participants talk extensively about Coleman’s concepts and his influence on them. Part 1 of the talk can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxlTHF5j4Wg>

generations of improvisers that had accepted Coleman's innovations as a natural evolution in style. By 1980, Anthony Braxton, Steve Coleman, Lester Bowie and others had cited Coleman as a major influence and the catalyst of a major movement in the music. Even more traditionally minded musicians like Wynton and Branford Marsalis were acknowledging his contribution to the genre.<sup>180</sup> These reactions, in addition to a slight upturn in public appetite for jazz in the 1980s, propelled Coleman out of the murky area between musical genres. In just two years (1986-1988) Coleman had recorded five new LPs with both Prime Time and other jazz artists.

By the 1990s the jazz community had finally stepped up to claim him as one of its own, and evidence of renewed interest in his music could be clearly seen in the emerging styles of young performers like Joshua Redman, who chose a Coleman composition, "Turnaround," for the first track on his debut album in 1994. Coleman would then record with a host of younger performers from the mid-1990s until his death in 2015. The last 25 years of his career, while slower in terms of activity, undoubtedly cemented his influence within all spheres of American music and even earned him a place in popular culture.

Coleman was using sampling and electronic effects long before other jazz artists. Additionally, he had merged hip-hop idioms into his style before any of the current generation of musicians (Joshua Redman, Chris Potter, Troy Roberts, Robert Glasper, The Bad Plus, etc.) were credited with bringing these sounds into the music. Since harmolodics was intended to bridge gaps in all kinds of musical sounds, Coleman's recordings were always on the cutting edge of the genre.

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<sup>180</sup> The Marsalis brothers have praised Coleman publicly in several interviews. However, both of them have been less accepting of other members of the avant-garde community.

Coleman's greatest influence on other artists has not been in terms of the instrumentation of his ensembles, or even their characteristic sounds. It has instead been achieved through the spread of his harmolodic mission, and his ideas of music as an egalitarian art form; one without restrictions, territories, or boundaries. His mission to "remove the caste system from sound" may have even further reaching implications than even Coleman had envisioned.

Free jazz musicians like Coleman and his contemporaries had a direct impact on the music of punk rock groups in later decades. The ideals of freedom of choice, unrestricted artistic growth, community activism, self determination and distance from traditional notions of virtuosity were common areas of interest to performers of both styles. The political leanings of the second wave of avant-garde New York artists, AACM in Chicago, and the Black Arts Collective in St. Louis were also influential for rock musicians who sought to perform more shocking, raw and direct forms of protest music.

Additionally, the freedom that improvisation represents is appealing to a wide variety of artists, especially those who are interested in making a personal connection to their audiences and giving them a new, engaging experience at every occasion. Jam bands both old (Grateful Dead, Phish, Medeski, Martin and Wood) and new, (Lettuce, Snarky Puppy, Soulive, daKAH Hip Hop Orchestra) have in some way learned from Coleman's adaptive abilities. In short, jam bands were nothing short of improvising ensembles which now used electric and electronic instruments and other modern touches. Coleman may have been one of the first artists to realize that jazz musicians were not the only improvising artists in western cultures. An entirely new language was born out of the synthesis of the previously developed styles, and Coleman was willing to give them credit for their work, even going so far as to remark that the Grateful Dead and Prime Time were sharing the same musical space.



For these musicians, Coleman's ideals of performance represented an ultimate expression of unrestricted creativity. Modern musicians like Robert Glasper certainly respected Coleman's non-adherence to traditional jazz styles, as did the idea that Coleman was not essentially a "legend" of the jazz canon. He had instead started as an iconoclast, and was still attempting to pursue new directions for his music, even into his 60s and 70s.

By this measure, Coleman still had the spirit of a younger artist. He was driven, experimental and cutting edge. He had invented his own musical language and had refused to compromise. He had eventually forced the musical world to take notice, despite all of the other factors that had limited him in the past. Coleman was not a legendary figure to be admired on a pedestal, he was a living, breathing role model for younger improvisers and performers, even up until the 1990s and 2000s.

By the later decades of his career Coleman was playing only to the audiences that he felt could appreciate his music the most. This often included performances in more mainstream venues, to people that were most accustomed to listening to jam band style music. Since Coleman had so frequently exceeded the confines of the jazz genre in the past, it was only natural that he also find performance opportunities that did not limit the expectations of his audiences. His performances at Bonnaroo and his curation of the Meltdown Festival were a clear signal that Coleman wanted to relate his art to the listeners. He had assimilated himself into the jam band scene on a minor level, reinventing his art once again simply based on the context in which it was presented.

At this point, the true extent of Coleman's influence is still being discovered. The connections made in this dissertation's final chapter are a start, but by no means the final word on this subject. It will become apparent over time just how far reaching Coleman's art and philosophies have become. Even after his death, it is likely that his recordings will be enjoyed far

into the future. Newer recordings of unreleased material will likely surface in the coming years, as has been routinely expected over the last several decades. Coleman has again and again forced us to reckon with our assumptions about what constitutes the jazz genre and how music relates to our lives. Other scholars will undoubtedly find new meanings in his words and new perspectives for examining his music. The harmolodic discussion is still only just beginning.

## APPENDIX A: DISCOGRAPHY

### Ornette Coleman as Leader:

Coleman, Ornette. *Something Else!!!* With Don Cherry, Walter Norris, Don Payne, Billy Higgins, © 1958, 1990, 2005 by Contemporary Records.

*Tomorrow is the Question.* With Don Cherry, Percy Heath, Red Mitchel, Shelly Manne © 1959, 1980, 1997 by Contemporary Records

*The Shape of Jazz to Come.* With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Billy Higgins. © 1959, 1987, 2005 by Atlantic Records.

*Change of the Century.* With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Billy Higgins. © 1960, 1992, 2005 by Atlantic Records.

*This is Our Music.* With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden and Ed Blackwell © 1960 by Atlantic Records

*Free Jazz: A Collective Improvisation.* With Ed Blackwell, Don Cherry, Eric Dolphy, Scott LaFaro, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins, and Freddy Hubbard. © 1960, 1990 by Atlantic Records.

*Ornette!* With Don Cherry, Scott LaFaro and Ed Blackwell © 1961 by Atlantic Records

*Ornette on Tenor.* With Don Cherry, Jimmy Garrison and Ed Blackwell © 1961 by Atlantic Records

*The Art of the Improvisers.* With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Scott LaFaro, Jimmy Garrison, Billy Higgins, Ed Blackwell (Recorded 1959-1961) © 1963, 1970 by Atlantic Records

*Twins.* With Eric Dolphy, Don Cherry, Freddy Hubbard, Charlie Haden, Scott LaFaro, Billy Higgins, Ed Blackwell (Recorded 1959-1961) © 1965, 1971 by Atlantic

*To Whom Keeps a Record.* With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins, Ed Blackwell, (Recorded 1959-1960) © 1965, 1975 by Atlantic.

*Live at Town Hall 1962.* With David Izenzon, Charles Moffat, Selwart Clark, Nathan Goldstein, Julian Barber, Kermit Moore, © 1966, 1975 by ESP

*Chappaqua Suite.* With Pharaoh Sanders, David Izenzon, Charles Moffett and Orchestra under direction of Joseph Tekula, © 1965 by Columbia Records

*At the Golden Circle, Stockholm: Volume 1 & 2.* With David Izenzon, and Charles Moffett. © 1965, 1987, 2004, 2005 by Blue Note..

*The Empty Foxhole.* With Denardo Coleman, and Charlie Haden. © 1966, 1994, 2000 by Blue Note. EMI Music Distribution

*New York is Now!* With Mel Furman, Dewey Redman, Jimmy Garrison, Elvin Jones, © 1967 by Blue Note

*Love Call.* With Jimmy Garrison, Elvin Jones, and Dewey Redman. © 1968, 1990 by Blue Note.

*Crisis.* With Denardo Coleman, Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, and Dewey Redman. ©1969 by Impulse!

*Ornette at 12.* With Denardo Coleman, Charlie Haden, and Dewey Redman. © 1969 by Impulse!

*Friends and Neighbors: Live at Prince Street.* With Dewey Redman, Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell © 1970 by Flying Dutchman

*The Complete Science Fiction Sessions.* With Webster Armstrong, Ed Blackwell, Bobby Bradford, Carmon Fornarotto, Charlie Haden, David Henderson, Billy Higgins, Asha Puthli, Dewey Redman, and Gerard Schwarg.(Recorded 1971) © 2000 by Sony- BMG. Sony Music Distribution

*Skies of America.* With the London Symphony Orchestra under the direction of David Measham. © 1972, 2000 by Columbia.

*Dancing in Your Head.* With Charles Ellerbee, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Bern Nix, Robert Palmer, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and The Master Musicians of Joujouka. © 1975, 1999, 2000 by Polygram.

*Body Meta.* With Charles Ellerbee, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Bern Nix, and Jamaaladeen Tacuma. ©1976, 1996 by Verve.

*Soapsuds, Soapsuds.* With Charlie Haden. © 1978, 1996 by Verve.

*Of Human Feelings.* With Denardo Coleman, Charles Ellerbee, Bern Nix, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, and Calvin Westin. © 1979, 1982 by Antilles.

*Opening the Caravan of Dreams.* With Denardo Coleman, Charles Ellerbee, Sabir Kamal, Albert MacDowell, Bern Nix, Jamaaladeen Tacuma © 1985 by Caravan of Dreams

*Song X.* With Pat Metheny, Jack DeJohnette, Charlie Haden, Denardo Coleman, © 1985 by Geffen Records

*In All Languages.* Side A: Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins. Side B: Denardo Coleman, Calvin Weston, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, Al MacDowell, Charles Ellerbee, Bern Nix. © 1987 by Caravan of Dreams

*Virgin Beauty.* With Denardo Coleman, Charles Ellerbee, Jerry Garcia, Albert Macdowell, Bern Nix, Chris Walker, Calvin Weston © 1988 by Portrait

*Tone Dialing.* With Dave Bryant, Chris Rosenberg, Ken Wessel, Bradley Jones, Al MacDowell, Chris Walker, Denardo Coleman, Badal Roy, Aveda Khadija, Moishe Nalm. © 1995 by Harmolodic (Verve)

*Sound Museum: Hidden Man.* With Geri Allen, Charnett Moffett, Denardo Coleman. © 1996 by Harmolodic (Verve)

*Sound Museum: Three Women.* With Geri Allen, Charnett Moffett, Denardo Coleman. © 1996 by Harmolodic (Verve)

*Colors: Live from Leipzig.* With Joahim Kühn. © 1997 by Harmolodic (Verve)

*Sound Grammar.* With Gregory Cohn, Tony Falanga, Denardo Coleman. © 2006 by Sound Grammar

*\*New Vocabulary.* With Amir Ziv, Jordan McLean, Adam Holtzman. © 2014 by System Dialing Records<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> It is unclear whether or not Coleman lead this session as his permission for its release is still in dispute.

### **As Sideman or Cameo Appearance:**

Allen, Geri. *Eyes in the Back of Your Head*. With Wallace Roney, Cyro Baptista. © 1995 by Blue Note

Bley, Paul. *Live at the Hillcrest Club 1958*. With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins. © 1976 by Inner City

Bley, Paul. *Coleman Classics Vol. 1*. With Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins. © 1976 by Atlantic Records

Coltrane, Alice. *Universal Consciousness*. With Rashied Ali, Ornette Coleman, Jack DeJohnette, Jimmy Garrison, Clifford Jarvis, Leroy Jenkins, and Tulusi. © 1971, 2002 by Impulse!

Haden, Charlie. *"Closeness" Duets*. With Ornette Coleman, Alice Coltrane, and Keith Jarrett. © 1992 by A&M.

Henry, Joe. *Scar*. With Mark Ribot, Bobby Malach, Brad Mehldau, David Piltch, Brian Blade, Abe Laboriel, Meshell Ndegeocello. © 2002 by Mammoth

McLean, Jackie. *New and Old Gospel*. With Lamont Johnson, Scott Holt, and Billy Higgins. © 1968 by Blue Note

Ono, Yoko. *Yoko Ono*. With David Izenzon, Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell, John Lennon, Ringo Starr, Klaus Voorman. © 1970 by Apple Records

Reed, Lou. *The Raven*. With Mike Rathke, Fernando Saunders, Tony Smith, Friedrich Paravicini, Jane Scarpantoni, Doug Wieselman, Paul Shapiro, Steve Bernstein. © 2003 by Sire Records

Schuller, Gunther. *Jazz Abstractions*. With Eric Dolphy, Jim Hall, Robert DiDomenica, Bill Evans, Eddie Costa, Alfred Brown, Sticks Evans. © 1961 by Atlantic

Tacuma, Jamaaladeen. *Renaissance Man*. With Charles Ellerbee, Ebony String Quartet, Ron Howerton. © 1984 by Gramavision

Tacuma, Jamaaladeen. *For the Love of Ornette*. Tony Kofi, Wolfgang Puschnig, Yoichi Uzeki, Justin Faulkner, Wadud Ahmad, David "Fingers" Hayes. © 2010 by Jam All Productions

Ulmer, James Blood. *Tales of Captain Black*. With Denardo Coleman, Ornette Coleman, and Jamaaladeen Tacuma. © 1996, 1999 by DIW (Japan).

**APPENDIX B: UNANNOTATED TRANSCRIPTIONS (FOR FURTHER STUDY OR  
PERFORMANCE)**

## 3 Wishes

4x/7x/3x

1.

3

2.

3(4. 5. 6. 7.)

Last X to Coda (After B)

5

3x

D.C.

C

Fine



CONCERT

# ALL MY LIFE

ORNETTE COLEMAN

**A**

1. I'VE WAIT-ED ALL MY LIFE FOR YOU AND NOW YOU'RE HERE  
2. MY HEART AND I AGREE TO WAIT FOR YOU. I'M GLAD.

This system contains the first six measures of the piece. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the staff.

8

YOU NE-VER KNEW ME THOUGH I KNEW YOU LONG A GO YOUR NAME HAS BEEN MY  
IT SEEMS SO LONG A GO JOY, THAT I NE-VER KNEW. TIME NE-VER WILL EX

This system contains measures 7 through 12. The melody continues in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The lyrics are written below the staff.

13

LOVE AL-WAYS AND NOW I'M YOURS  
IST FOR ME AND YOU A-GAIN

This system contains measures 13 through 17. The melody continues in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The lyrics are written below the staff.

18 **B** ALTO

C F E-7 A-7 D<sup>9</sup> G7<sup>ALT</sup> C

This system contains measures 18 through 23. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The lyrics are written below the staff.

24

A-7 D7 B-7 E-7 F7 F#<sup>0</sup> GaddC G

This system contains measures 24 through 29. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The lyrics are written below the staff.

V.S.

29

Bm7 Em7 Am7/D D7

34

**C**

1. My HEART AND I A - GREED TO WAIT FOR YOU, I'M GLAD.  
 2. I've WAIT-ED ALL MY LIFE FOR YOU AND NOW YOU'RE HERE

C F E-7 A-7 D<sup>9</sup> G<sup>7</sup>ALT C

40

IT SEEMS SO LONG A GO JOY, THAT I NE-VER KNEW TIME NE-VER WILL EX  
 YOU NE-VER KNEW ME THOUGH I KNEW YOU LONG A GO YOUR NAME HAS BEEN MY

A-7 D7 B-7 E-7 F7 F#0 GaddC G

45

IST FOR ME AND YOU A - GAIN  
 LOVE AL - WAYS AND NOW I'M YOURS

Bm7 Em7 Am7/D D7

50


**D**

YOUR NAME HAS BEEN MY LOVE AL WAYS AND NOW I'M YOURS

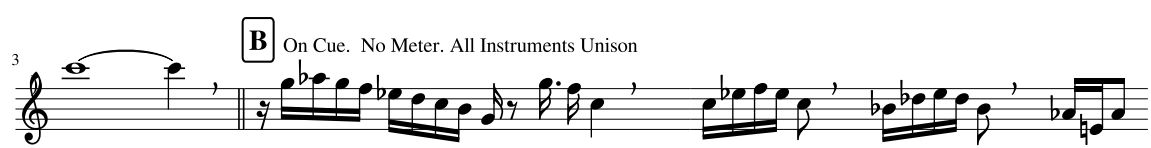
G Bm7 Em7 Am7/D A<sup>9</sup>#11 D7 F#<sup>9</sup>/E

# City Living


**A** *Ad. Lib.* (number of times)



3 **B** On Cue. No Meter. All Instruments Unison



6 D.C.  
Last x Fine



The image shows three staves of musical notation. The first staff, labeled 'A', begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 5/4 time signature. It contains a single note followed by a repeat sign and a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff, labeled 'B', starts with a measure number '3' and a treble clef. It features a series of beamed sixteenth notes and eighth notes. The third staff begins with a measure number '6' and a treble clef, continuing the melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The notation concludes with a double bar line and the instruction 'D.C. Last x Fine'.

CONCERT

## CIVILIZATION DAY

ORNETTE COLEMAN

The musical score for "Civilization Day" by Ornette Coleman is presented in three staves. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4.

**Staff 1:** Measures 1-3. Measure 1 has a G chord above it. Measure 2 has a (D7) chord above it. Measure 3 has a G chord above it. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes.

**Staff 2:** Measures 4-6. Measure 4 has a 4 above it and a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 5 has a (C7) chord above it. Measure 6 has a G chord above it. The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes.

**Staff 3:** Measures 7-9. Measure 7 has a 7 above it. Measures 8 and 9 feature triplets of eighth notes, each with a 3 below it. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

## European Echoes

**A**

Section A consists of seven measures in 3/4 time. The first measure begins with a repeat sign. The melody is composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with the final measure featuring a triplet of sixteenth notes.

8 **B**

Section B spans measures 8 through 15. It begins with a half rest followed by a quarter note, then continues with a series of quarter and eighth notes. Measure 15 concludes with a sharp sign on the F line.

16

This block contains measures 16 through 25. The melody continues with a mix of quarter and eighth notes. Measure 25 ends with a sharp sign on the F line.

26

The final block contains measures 26 through 32. It features a variety of note values including quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. The section concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

CONCERT

# HAPPY HOUSE

ORNETTE COLEMAN

The musical score for "Happy House" by Ornette Coleman is presented in piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into five systems of music.

**System 1:** Features chords F and C7. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a whole rest in the bass.

**System 2:** Features chords D7, G, C7, and Fm7. The melody includes eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass.

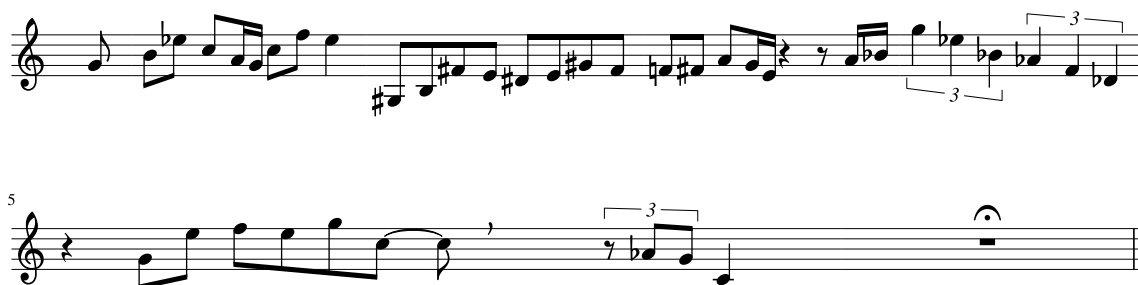
**System 3:** Features chords E7, A7, F#7, Bm1, E7, and A. The melody includes eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass.

**System 4:** Features chords Eb and Bb7. The melody includes eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass.

**System 5:** Features chords Eb and Bb7. The melody includes eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass.

**SOLOS:** The final system is marked "SOLOS" and features a 2/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes. The system concludes with a triplet of eighth notes in the treble and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass.

## Jordan



CONCERT

# THE JUNGLE IS A SKYSCRAPER

ORNETTE COLEMAN

FAST  $B\flat$   $F^7$   $B\flat$   $F^7$

$G^7$   $C_{M7}$   $D_{M7}$   $G^7$

$C_{M7}$   $F^7$   $B\flat^7$

CHANGES IF USED

$B\flat$   $B\flat$   $F^7$   $B\flat$   $F^7$   $F^7$   $G^7$   $G^7$

$C_{M7}$   $C_{M7}$   $D_{M7}$   $G^7$   $C_{M7}$   $C_{M7}$   $F^7$   $B\flat$



# Mothers of the Veil

**A**  $A\flat\text{Maj7}/E\flat$   $G\flat\text{Maj7}/D\flat$

$A\flat\text{Maj7}/E\flat$   $G\flat\text{Maj7}/D\flat$   $D\flat\text{Maj7}/A\flat$

$B\text{Maj7}/F\sharp$   $D\flat\text{Maj7}/A\flat$   $B\text{Maj7}/F\sharp$

**B**  $A\flat\text{Maj7}/F$   $F-7$   $A\flat6/F$

$F-7$

$D\flat\text{Maj7}/F$   $F-7$

# Peace

Musical score for "Peace" in 4/4 time, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score consists of three staves of music.

Staff 1 (Measures 1-3):  
Measure 1: Quarter note B-flat, quarter note A-flat, quarter note G, quarter note F.  
Measure 2: Quarter note E-flat, quarter note D, quarter note C, quarter note B-flat.  
Measure 3: Quarter note A, quarter note G, quarter note F, quarter note E.

Staff 2 (Measures 4-8):  
Measure 4: Quarter note D, quarter note C, quarter note B-flat, quarter note A.  
Measure 5: Quarter note G, quarter note F, quarter note E, quarter note D.  
Measure 6: Quarter note C, quarter note B-flat, quarter note A, quarter note G.  
Measure 7: Quarter note F, quarter note E, quarter note D, quarter note C.  
Measure 8: Quarter note B-flat, quarter note A, quarter note G, quarter note F.  
Measure 9: Quarter note E, quarter note D, quarter note C, quarter note B-flat.

Staff 3 (Measures 10-14):  
Measure 10: Quarter note A, quarter note G, quarter note F, quarter note E.  
Measure 11: Quarter note D, quarter note C, quarter note B-flat, quarter note A.  
Measure 12: Quarter note G, quarter note F, quarter note E, quarter note D.  
Measure 13: Quarter note C, quarter note B-flat, quarter note A, quarter note G.  
Measure 14: Quarter note F, quarter note E, quarter note D, quarter note C.

Annotations:  
- Measure 4: "Straight 8ths" (referring to the eighth notes in measures 4-8).  
- Measure 10: "Straight 8ths" (referring to the eighth notes in measures 10-14).

# Peace Warriors

6x

2

6

10

The musical score for 'Peace Warriors' is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a repeat sign. The melody starts on a whole note F#4, followed by a half note G#4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a half note C5, a quarter note D5, a quarter note E5, and a half note F#5. The second staff starts at measure 2 and continues the melody with a quarter note G#4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a half note D5, a half note E5, a quarter note F#5, and a quarter note G#5. The third staff starts at measure 6 and continues the melody with a quarter note A5, a quarter note B5, a quarter note C6, a quarter note D6, a half note E6, a half note F#6, a quarter note G#6, and a quarter note A6. The fourth staff starts at measure 10 and continues the melody with a quarter note B6, a quarter note C7, a quarter note D7, a quarter note E7, a half note F#7, a half note G#7, a quarter note A7, and a quarter note B7. The score ends with a double bar line.

## Word from Bird



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